

By the same Author

THE STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL

ESSAYS ON
LITERATURE AND
SOCIETY

By
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LONDON
THE HOGARTH PRESS
1949

PUBLISHED BY
The Hogarth Press Ltd
LONDON

Clarke, Irwin & Company Ltd
TORONTO

PRODUCED IN COMPLETE CON-
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ROBERT HENRYSON

HENRYSON'S poetry has two main virtues, one the property of his age, the other more specifically his own. The first is as important as the second. He lived near the end of a great age of settlement, religious, intellectual and social; an agreement had been reached regarding the nature and meaning of human life, and the imagination could attain harmony and tranquillity. It was one of those ages when everything, in spite of the practical disorder of life, seems to have its place; the ranks and occupations of men, the hierarchy of animals; good and evil, the earth, heaven and hell; and the life of man and of the beasts turns naturally into a story because it is part of a greater story about which there is general consent. Henryson, like Chaucer, exists in that long calm of storytelling which ended with the Renaissance, when the agreement about the great story was broken. There is still an echo of the tranquillity in Spenser. But in *The Faerie Queene* he deals with the delightful creatures of his fancy, and Chaucer and Henryson deal with men and women, wolves and sheep, cats and mice.

The virtue of the story while it lasted was that it made everything natural, even tragedy; so that while pity had a place, there was no place for those outcries against life which fill the tragic drama of the next age. The framework and the nature of the story excluded them. And the pity itself is different from that of the Elizabethans, as deep, but tranquillised by the knowledge that tragedy has its place in the story. The poet accepts life, as the Elizabethans tried to do, but is also

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resigned to it; the acceptance implying the resignation, and the resignation the acceptance. This attitude makes the age between Chaucer and Henryson the great age of the story. The Elizabethan drama arose when the long peace of storytelling was broken.

The sense that all life, whether of the animals or of men, is a story and part of a greater story, is then one of the surviving virtues of Henryson's poetry, strong enough still, in spite of all that has happened since, to produce a composing effect on us and remind us of a standard of proportion which has been lost. It is the virtue of an age, not ours, and it required to embody it a particular form of art, not ours, and in the practice of that art Henryson was almost perfect

Upon ane tyme (as Esope culd Report)
Ane lytill Mous came till ane Revir syde,
Scho nicht not waid, hir schankis were sa schort,
Scho culd not swym, scho had na hors to ryde
Of verray force behovit hir to byde,
And to and fra besyde that Revir deip
Scho ran, cryand with mony pietuous peip

We recognise the narrative art of an age, which passed with that age. In Henryson what delights us is the perfection with which it is controlled, its speed, which is neither hurried nor lumbering, and the momentary touches of humour and fancy which, while never retarding the story, give it interest and vivacity:

Scho culd not swym, scho had na hors to ryde

Henryson's personal contribution to that consummate art was a fanciful eye for detail and a profound sense of situation, most usually comic, but in one or two cases tragic. *The Moral Fabillis of Esope the Phrygian* is his great humorous, and *The Testament of Cresseid* his great tragic work. During the last century

The Fables have been overshadowed by *The Testament*, and their beauties neglected. But to appreciate the sweetness and harmony, the endlessly lively and inventive quality of Henryson's poetry, it is necessary to know them both, otherwise he runs the danger of being considered a poet of moderate capacity who, by a piece of good luck, wrote one great poem

Most of the fables, though not all, are humorous. Henryson's humour is not quite like anything else in Scottish literature, more subtle and pervasive than the humour of Dunbar or Burns or Scott, more urbane, more indirect, less specialised, and saturated with irony. It is an assumption more than anything else; it remains implicit in the selection of detail and the choice of expression, and rarely comes to the point of statement. The fables transport us into a mood in which we see everything as Henryson sees it, with the same tender ironical humour, but without being able to explain very clearly how the mood has been induced. His sense of the ridiculous is so delicate and exact that the faintest emphasis is sufficient to indicate it, and more than the faintest would distort it. His more obvious strokes of humour, therefore, do not represent him best; as, for instance, when the fox kills a young lamb at Lent, dips it in the stream, and fishes it out, crying:

"Ga doun schir Kid, cum up schir salmond agane"

The quality which transmutes these fables and our mood as we read them is less obvious and more delicate, and consists in a fine decorative sense of the absurd. We find it in the account of the Burgess Mouse on her way to visit her sister in the country:

Bairfute, allone, with pykestaf in hir hand,
As pure pylgrime scho passit out of town,
To seik hir sister baith oure dail and down.

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We find it in the lament of Pertok the hen for Chanteciere carried off by the fox:

“Allace,” quod Pertok, makand sair murning,
With teiris grit attour hir cheikis fell,
“Yone wes our drowrie, and our dayis darling,
Our nichtingall, and als our Orloge bell,
Our walkryfe watche, us for to warn and tell
Quhen that Aurora with hir curcheis gray
Put up hir heid betwix the nicht and day

“Quha sall our lemman be? quha sall us leid?
Quhen we ar sad, quha sall unto us sing?
With his sweit Bill he wald brek us the breid
In all this warld wes thair ane kynder thing?
In paramouris he wald do us plesing,
At his power, as nature did him geif
Now eftir him, allace, how sall we leif?”

In this passage Henryson's sense of the ridiculous is touched with pity, as it often is, and the pity with fantasy. The pity is real, but as we feel it we smile at it, yet without thinking the less of it. The touches in these verses are exquisite.

Our nichtingall, and als our Orloge bell, .
With his sweit Bill he wald brek us the breid
In all this warld wes thair ane kynder thing?

These felicitous inventions run through *The Fables* and give the dry stories their delightful life. They stray even into the *Moralitas* with which each fable ends. These little sermons have been blamed for their dullness, but one suspects that in many of them Henryson retains his irony. It is difficult to believe that a man with such a fine sense of the ridiculous could have written without knowing what he was doing,

The hennis are warkis that ffra ferme faith proceedis,

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at the end of a fable where hens and various beasts play their part. And the more serious of the *Moralitas* have a sincerity that is far from dullness

The allegory is a form which the modern taste finds stilted and unreal, because the great story as Chaucer and Henryson knew it is dead. But while that story lasted the allegory was a perfectly natural convention—the most convenient device for telling it. *The Fables* belong to that modest kind of allegory which finds in the lives of the animals a pattern of human life. It has obvious merits, it simplifies life; it so reduces the dimensions of the human situation that we can easily grasp them; it divests the characters of all adventitious pomp and glory, as well as of all that passes in our time under the name of ideology; it lays bare with a force beyond the reach of literary naturalism the solid egoistic motives of action. This is doubtless what once made it such a popular and democratic form of art

But in Henryson it assumes virtues of a rarer kind. Human snobbishness becomes touching and forgivable to him when he finds it in the Burgess Mouse. The crimes of the Fox and the Wolf become imaginatively comprehensible, and to that extent excusable, since all the animals act in accordance with their nature. The result is that the animal allegory, when it is not employed satirically, runs the danger of making us indiscriminately indulgent to all the faults and crimes of mankind, and the more lively the imagination of the poet, the more completely he enters into the nature of his allegorical characters, the Lion, the Wolf, the Fox, the Cat, the greater this danger becomes. So the fable has to be followed by the *Moralitas*, that human proportion may be preserved

There are one or two fables in which Henryson achieves a profound effect of tragedy and pity, and moves us quite differently. An instance is *The*

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Preiching of the Swallow It is distinguished from the other fables by the solemnity of the opening:

The hie prudence, and warking mervelous,
The profound wit of God omnipotent,
Is sa perfyte, and sa Ingenious,
Excellend ffar all mannis Jugement,
Foi quhy to him all thing is ay present,
Rycht as it is, or ony tyme sall be,
Befoir the sicht off his Divinitie

The argument proceeds in this vein to the conclusion

That God in all his werkis wittie is

The seasons are advanced in illustration of this, and Henryson describes how he walked out on a spring day to watch the labourers in the fields; and thereupon he suddenly comes upon the tragic theme of the poem. A flock of birds alights on a hedge near by, they are having a loud dispute with a Swallow, who has been warning them of their danger.

"Schir Swallow" (quod the Lark agane) and leuch,
"Quhat haif ye sene that causis yow to dreid?"
"Se ye yone Churl" (quod scho) "beyond yone pleuch,
Fast sawand hemp, and gude linget seid?
Yone lint will grow in lytill tyme in deid,
And thairoff will yone Churl his Nettis mak,
Under the quhilk he thinkis us to tak

"Thairfor I rede we pas quhen he is gone,
At evin, and with our naillis scharp and small
Out off the eirth scraip we yone seid anone,
And eit it up, ffor, giff it growis, we sall
Haif caus to weip heirefter ane and all "

In June Henryson walks out again

Unto the hedge under the Hawthorne grene

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and the birds come and resume their dispute The
Swallow cries:

“O, blind birdis¹ and full of negligence,
Unmyndful of your awin prosperitie,
Lift up your sicht, and tak gude advertence,
Luke to the Lint that growis on yone le,
Yone is the thing I bad forsuith that we,
Quhill it wes seid, suld rute furth off the eird,
Now is it Lint, now is it hie on breird

“Go yit, quhill it is tender and small,
And pull it up, let it na mair Incres,
My flesche growis, my bodie quaikis all,
Thinkand on it I may not sleep in peis

“The awner off yone lint ane fouler is,
Richt cautelous and full off subteltie,
His pray full sendill tymis will he mis,
Bot giff we birdis all the warrer be,
Full mony off our kin he hes gart de,
And thocht it bot ane sport to spill thair blude,
God keip me ffra him, and the halie Rude ”

The lint ripens and is gathered and spun into thread,
and the net is woven for the fowler's use. Winter
comes; the fowler clears a place in the snow and strews
chaff on it to attract the birds, and while they scrape
and scratch he throws the net over them.

Allace¹ it was grit hart sair for to se
That bludie Bowcheour beit thay birdis down,
And ffor till heir, quhen thay wist weill to de,
Thair*cairfull sang and lamentatioun
Sum with ane staf he straik to eirth on swoun
Off sum the heid he straik, off sum he brak the crag,
Sum half on lyve he stoppit in his bag

The poem produces a strong feeling of approaching
danger and of a blindness that no warning can pierce.

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It is filled with pity and a sort of second-sight which makes one think of Cassandra:

"This grit perrell I tauld thame mair than thryis,
Now ar thay deid, and wo is me thairfoir!"

There is an echo of the last line in *The Testament of Cresseid*

The continuous interest and liveliness of the detail makes *The Fables* one of the most delightful books in Scottish literature. Detail is a matter of invention, an imaginative conclusion from the facts given; it creates the body of the story, which otherwise would be a mere bare framework. Situation is an imaginative conclusion on a greater scale, and gathers up a larger number and variety of elements. Henryson's genius is shown in his invention in both kinds, and *The Testament of Cresseid* is his great achievement in situation. It seems to have been his own invention purely; Mr. Harvey Wood in his consummate edition of Henryson implies it, and Sir Herbert Grierson is of the same opinion. "It was no light thing", he says, "to come after Boccaccio and to succeed in making a real addition to a great dramatic story, something that without needless challenging of comparison does, in its impressive way, complete that tragic tale"

In his essay Sir Herbert speculates on the reason why Henryson should have been moved to add to a tale already accepted, and in the course of doing so he says the best things that have yet been said about the poem. "Chaucer had, in his courtly and detached manner, avoided any moral judgment upon Cresseid. . . The only moral which he will enforce at the end of the whole tale is the religious one—that all earthly things are vanity. . . But Henryson is not content with what, after all, is an evasion—he, a Scot and a Schoolemaister, with a Scot's and a schoolmaster's belief in retribution.

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The result might have been disastrous—a dry or a piously unreal didactic poem. But it is not, and that for two reasons. In the first place, Henryson retains Chaucer's sympathy with Cresseid . . . In the second place, his morality is sound and sincere, not the preacher's conventional acceptance of standards which he has not made his own. For the retribution which overtakes Cresseid in the poem is the retribution of her own heart. . . . It is not the leprosy we think of as her penalty but the last encounter with Troilus and its reaction on her own soul." And Sir Herbert goes on to say that when the poem ends it has produced "a real *catharsis* leaving us at peace with Cresseid as Chaucer's poem scarcely does".

There is only one thing in this criticism with which one is tempted to disagree. I mean the assumption that Scots and schoolmasters have a belief in retribution stronger than that of Italians and Englishmen and playwrights, that Henryson was the retributive kind of Scotsman and schoolmaster, and that the spirit of the poem is in any sense a spirit of retribution. It is filled with pity. Indeed what Sir Herbert brings out so convincingly is that the poem is a more humanly satisfying end to the story than either of the earlier versions had provided, and exhibits a profound humanity which will not rest content with anything less, as the crown of the story, than a genuine reconciliation of the heart. In seeking this reconciliation through retribution Henryson was no more peculiarly Scottish than in refraining from doing so Chaucer was peculiarly English, or Boccaccio peculiarly Italian. This is not a matter of nationality. It would be superfluous to labour the point if there were not a sort of conspiracy to make Henryson a bleak and harsh writer, if Miss Agnes Mure Mackenzie had not called *The Testament* stern, and other critics had not cited it as a proof that the

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Scots have always been dour and harsh in their human judgments. As well call Dante harsh for his treatment of Francesca, or Shakespeare dour for having Desdemona and Cordelia murdered.

The keynote of the poem is sympathy, as Sir Herbert Grierson points out, not judgment, though its theme is judgment. But the judgment is transformed when it is accepted by Cresseid in a moment of realisation; and that, indeed, is what brings about the reconciliation of which Sir Herbert speaks. Henryson's humanity is clear from the beginning of the poem; perhaps indeed humanity is a better word to describe his temper than sympathy: a humanity so simple that it needs only the most ordinary words to give it utterance, the more ordinary the better. He sees misfortune, not guilt, in Cresseid's conduct after she was turned away by Diomedes:

Than desolait scho walkit up and down,
And sum men says into the Court commoun

He pities her "mischance" when she was forced to

go amang the Greikis air and lait
Sa gígotlike, takand thy foull plesance¹
I have pietie thou suld fall sic mischance

He interposes his charity between her and her accusers:

Yet nevertheless quhat ever men deme or say
In scornfull language of thy brukkilness,
I sall excuse, as far furth as I may,
Thy womanheid, thy wisdom and fairness,
The quhilk Fortun has put to sic distres
As hir plesit, and nothing throw the gilt
Of the, throw wickit language to be spilt

He attributes Cresseid's misfortunes and faults to chance, and absolves her of all guilt; and this is the

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assumption running through the poem. He does not bring her to judgment, as some critics have implied; he shows the judgment of fate and of her own heart overtaking her. His humanity in dealing with her is perfectly simple, but its simplicity contains this surprise.

It is this simple and yet surprising humanity that brings about the finest effects of style in the poem, I mean those lines which seem at once the result of exquisite poetic judgment and of a humanity so obvious that it has become sure of itself and seizes at once the ultimate situation, formulating it in the fewest possible words, words which seem just adequate and no more, and in that appear to achieve a more secure finality: all that might have been said being made superfluous by the few simple words that are said. When Cresseid is stricken with leprosy and goes to her father for comfort, Henryson leaves one line to tell of their grief.

Thus was thair cair aneuch betwix thame twane

In Cresseid's Complaint one line suffices to draw the contrast between her present and her former condition:

Quhair is thy Chalmer wantounlie besene?

The incident of Troilus' meeting with her at a corner as he returns to Troy from fighting the Greeks is itself a compressed summary of the tragic situation, and is contained in three lines.

Than upon him scho kest up baith hir Ene,
And with ane blenk it come into his thocht,
That he sumtime hir face befor had sene

When she is told by her companions who it was that stopped beside her and threw a purse of gold in her lap, she compresses her fault into the cry:

"O fals Cresseid and trew Knicht Troilus!"

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Troilus, after hearing of her misfortunes and her death, seems again to be saying all that can be said when he exclaims:

"I can no moir
Scho was untrew, and wo is me thairfoir "

The epitaph which he inscribes on her tomb is in the same high concise style:

Lo, fair Ladyis, Crisseid, of Troyis toun,
Sumtyme countit the flour of Womanheid,
Under this stane lait Lipper lysis deid

No other Scottish poet has risen to this high and measured style, and Henryson himself does not attain it often, though he does as often as the subject requires it. Yet it is a style which one would have expected to suit the Scottish genius, with its seriousness and its love of compressed utterance. And that it does suit that genius is proved by Scottish folk-poetry, and particularly by the Ballads, with their complete seriousness and their extreme compression. But this gift, which belongs to the Scottish people, ceased after Henryson to belong to Scottish poets. Seriousness, though not compression, went for a long time into theology, a theology which was never more than mediocre. To the poet was left only a sort of secondary, official seriousness, that of

Man was made to mourn
and

But pleasures are like poppies spread

The Scottish poets followed the tradition of Dunbar, who expressed the exuberance, wildness and eccentricity of the Middle Ages, not that of Henryson, who inherited the medieval completeness and harmony, and

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the power to see life whole, without taking refuge in the facetious and the grotesque. Yet Henryson embodies more strikingly than any poet who has lived since the fundamental seriousness, humanity and strength of the Scottish imagination

“ROYAL MAN”

Notes on the tragedies of George Chapman

CHAPMAN'S virtues and faults are both excessive, and are combined in such a way that the faults seem to heighten the virtues, and the virtues to stiffen the faults. He erects his imperfections into principles, and keeps them erect by an act of will. When he succeeds he achieves an elevation beyond what seems possible, and when he fails, collapses into fantastic bathos. His mark is excess, itself a fault which he had seen splendidly displayed in Marlowe, the poet of his time whom he admired most. In Marlowe it is a quality of desire and imagination, in Chapman, of character and will. He is excessive on moral grounds, and because he believes that "royal man" should be excessive

Your mind, you say, kept in your flesh's bounds,
Shows that man's will must ruled be by his power,
When by true doctrine, you are taught to live
Rather without the body, than within,
And rather to your God still than yourself,
To live to him, is to do all things fitting
His image, in which, like himself, we live,
To be his image, is to do those things
That make us deathless, which by death is only,
Doing those deeds that fit eternity,
And those deeds are the perfecting the justice
That makes the world last

Chapman is not interested in human nature, or in practical morality, or in evil, but in the man of excessive virtue or spirit or pride. His tragedies show us one great figure and a crowd of nobodies who succeed some-

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how in destroying him. We do not believe in their power to do so until it is done, for the conflict is between a man of flesh and blood larger than life and puppets of cardboard. Yet the hero's death is real, so that we involuntarily think of it as self-inflicted or as brought about by some power outside the drama, the acts of the other characters being incapable of accounting for it. The death of Bussy D'Ambois and of Byron have, therefore, a sacrificial quality, we seem to be watching the pursuit and destruction of "royal man" by an invisible hunter. But we see them simultaneously merely as men who ignore the limitations of human life and are bound to destroy themselves, and their ostensible betrayers, the Montsurrys and La Fins—minuses whose very names seem unreal—can only look on and ratify the foregone verdict. These heroes really exist in another dimension from the rest of the characters, and have a different reality from the action in which they are involved. They wander about, like Chapman himself, enclosed in a dream of greatness and breathing the air of that dream.

It is in these remarkable figures that the dramatic interest of the tragedies resides, for they are conscious of another drama beyond the drama which is shown on the stage, and lift us up into it. In their great speeches they employ a language which is not meant for the other actors, they really talk to themselves, or address an imaginary audience outside the play. Chapman is not interested—except in one or two of his comedies—in character or even in action. He employs the action merely to display the soul in one of those supreme crises where action itself seems to become irrelevant, since it has done all that it can do, has come to its end, and can be disregarded. He is concerned solely with the crisis as a thing in itself, for in the crisis the real drama of his heroes is born and they rise into their own world; he

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therefore tries to reach it without the wearisome labour of working towards it through a methodical arrangement of situations. We can feel his impatience to arrive at those places where the souls of his heroes can expand to their full range, places on the frontier-line between life and death, time and eternity, where all terms seem to become absolute. Consequently a situation which to other tragic figures would bring despair or resignation, merely evokes new potentialities in his heroes, as if it were the opportunity for which they had been waiting. In a sense, therefore, his tragic scenes transcend tragedy, or fail to reach it, for death is merely the final assurance of immortality to his typical figures. They always possess this assurance; it is one of their distinguishing marks; but it grows stronger as by a mathematical law, the nearer death comes. In their death the dimension of tragedy expands to include an extra one which is not quite compatible with it, for in dying they conduct us a little distance into their own immortality. They look into that, not backwards at their destruction, except in the elegiac mood in which one may grieve for something that has happened in the past to oneself, or to a friend, or to some legendary figure in a book. The tragedies end in this way because Chapman is concerned with the soul as he conceives it, and with hardly anything else.

- This exclusive concern with the soul rather than with the way in which people behave makes him an erratic moralist. His judgments of conduct are sometimes strange and almost incomprehensible, the judgments of a man who is not interested in action, either on the stage or in the ordinary world. The action in a play is the prime means for bringing out the moral character of the actors and the moral significance of the situation. We do not come to know Bussy or Byron morally, as we know Macbeth and Hamlet, for the action has no

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real effect on them, since they live in a different world from the other characters, and are a law to themselves

There is no danger to a man that knows
What life and death is, there's not any law
Exceeds his knowledge, neither is it lawful
That he should stoop to any other law
He goes before them, and commands them all,
That to himself is a law rational

In a play, which is a pattern of action and interaction, there must be an implicit standard of judgment applied to all the characters and running through the whole, otherwise its progress is confused and dislocated. Chapman's tragedies are full of such dislocations; sometimes we cannot even guess at the standard by which he judges the action; we find such monstrosities as the scene in the first act of *The Tragedy of Bussy D'Ambois*, where Bussy pays court to the Duchess of Guise in the fustian of a low actor, and insults the Duke so obscurely that one can scarcely make out what he means. It is a scene of fantastic vulgarity, yet it draws this splendid encomium on Bussy from the King's brother:

His great heart will not down, 'tis like the sea,
That partly by his own internal heat,
Partly the stars' daily and nightly motion,
Their heat and light, and partly of the place,
The divers frames, but chiefly by the moon,
Bristled with suiges, never will be won,
(No, not when th' hearts of all those powers are burst)
To make retreat into his settled home,
Till he be crowned with his own quiet foam

There is no proportion between these lines and the conduct which inspires them, and there is little connection in *The Tragedy of Bussy D'Ambois* as a whole: here and there fine dramatic touches which come and go,

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but leave the characters and the action as they were. When the end does come, after these fits and starts, it comes abruptly, we scarcely know how.

Chapman's figures therefore stick out of the play, or rather burst through it, making havoc of the dramatic machinery and fixing our eyes upon them amid the ruins. Once there, they speak unencumbered in Chapman's own voice, a voice habitually choked by a consciousness of things too great for ordinary utterance and requiring the explosive power of some portent to liberate it. These mouthpieces of Chapman are images of man in his original virtue, there is nothing else quite like them in English literature. The sources from which he might have derived them are obvious enough—his long familiarity with the Homeric heroes, his absorption in Roman history and Senecan tragedy, his knowledge of the lives of some of the Renaissance princes, who attempted so many things which had seemed unthinkable before, and are described by Burckhardt. But the image into which his imagination melted those various conceptions of "loyal man" is striking and original. The French King, speaking of Bussy, gives the most complete idea of it

Cousin Guise, I wonder
Your honour'd disposition brooks so ill
A man so good, that only would uphold
Man in his native noblesse, from whose fall
All our dimensions rise, that in himself
(Without the outward patches of our frailty,
Riches and honour) knows he comprehends
Worth with the greatest, kings had never borne
Such boundless empire over other men,
Had all maintain'd the spirit and state of D'Ambois,
Nor had the full impartial hand of nature
That all things gave in her original,
Without these definite terms of mine and thine,

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Been turn'd unjustly to the hand of Fortune,
Had all preserved her in her prime, like D'Ambois,
No envy, no disjunction had dissolved
Or pluck'd one stick out of the golden faggot
In which the world of Saturn bound our lives,
Had all been held together with the nerves,
The genius, and th' ingenuous soul of D'Ambois

The idea that if man had not fallen there would be no kings or subjects, no mine or thine, recurs in the tragedies, and evokes an image which cannot be described either as a new ideal of society or as a new state of being. Bussy D'Ambois and Byron are unfallen men among the fallen, but their virtues are not Adam's, they are not equipped with innocence, but with native noblesse, spirit and state, genius and an ingenuous soul, the virtues of the Renaissance. Bussy is like a cross between Adam and Achilles crossed again by something quite different, the Renaissance man stepping out of the Middle Ages into a new world. There is something legendary in this figure, out of which Chapman might have created the myth of his age if he had possessed greater dramatic power and a less erratic genius. The legendary quality appears more clearly in the description of Byron sitting his horse.

Your Majesty hath miss'd a royal sight
The Duke Byron, on his brave beast Pastrana,
Who sits him like a full-sail'd argosy,
Danced with a lofty billow, and as snug
Plies to his bearer, both their motions mix'd,
And being consider'd in their site together
They do the best present the state of man
In his first royalty ruling, and of beasts
In their first loyalty serving, one commanding,
And no way being moved, the other serving,
And no way being compell'd, of all the sights
That ever my eyes witness'd, and they make

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A doctrinal and witty hieroglyphic
Of a blest kingdom to express and teach,
Kings to command as they could serve, and subjects
To serve as if they had power to command

"A doctrinal and witty hieroglyphic of a blest kingdom": this is the hypothesis on which the real drama of Chapman's heroes is grounded, an action elevated above the ostensible action. This blest kingdom is not set in the past, a mere recollection of the Golden Age, nor in the future, a prophecy of a coming society, but rather in a perpetual present apprehended and to that degree lived in by the hero, the unfallen man. We accept this hero and his drama as real, perhaps because with one part of him man still lives in the world before the Fall, and with another in the world after it, since the Fall—assuming that it stands for anything in human experience—is not a historical event but something which is always happening. Chapman's heroes exist more largely in the world before the Fall than any other figures in tragedy; it is for this reason that they are so clearly conscious of their immortality; for this reason, too, perhaps, that they are so awkward and clumsy in the world of action: we could hardly expect adroitness and expedience from these men existing

In all the free-born powers of royal man

It is not, then, the world in which they move, but the world we see through their eyes which gives Chapman's heroes their greatness. Their nature demands two things from that world created in their image: freedom and glory, but not power or love. In almost any page of the tragedies we find proofs of Chapman's possession by these qualities:

Hot, shining, swift, light, and aspiring things
Are of immortal and celestial nature.

“ROYAL MAN”

To fear a violent good, abuseth goodness,
'Tis immortality to die aspiring,
As if a man were taken quick to heaven,
What will not hold perfection, let it burst

I'll wear those golden spurs upon my heels,
And kick at fate, be free, all worthy spirits,
And stretch yourselves, for greatness and for height

This aspiring life just touching the earth and perpetually mounting into the air is suggested finely in his descriptions of his heroes fighting.

Like bonfires of contributory wood
Every man's look show'd, fed with others' spirit .

D'Ambois (that like a laurel put on fire
Sparkled and spit)

And then like flame and powder they commixt
So spritely, that I wish'd they had been spirits

He turn'd wild lightning in the lackeys' hands

their saucy fingers
Flew as too hot off, as he had been fire

The battles then in two half-moons enclosed him,
In which he showed as if he were the light,
And they but earth

These combats are not kindled and fed by merely human passion; they are like an explosion of the elements into speed and fire, impersonal, non-human, transmuting the fighting heroes into those

Hot, shining, swift, light, and aspiring things
which to Chapman were of immortal and celestial

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nature. In a well-known passage Clermont D'Ambois, Bussy's brother, says:

And know ye all (though far from all your aims,
Yet worth them all, and all men's endless studies)
That in this one thing, all the discipline
Of manners, and of manhood is contain'd,
A man to join himself with th' Universe,
In his main sway, and make (in all things fit)
One with that all, and go on, round as it

Clermont is expounding a high philosophical idea; but there are more ways of joining oneself with the universe than those he lays down, and Chapman's heroes inevitably make for that junction, whether in battle or in speculation or in death. Bussy's last speech calls up a gigantic vision of his memory being taken into the keeping of universal nature.

The equal thought I bear of life and death
Shall make me faint on no side, I am up,
Here like a Roman statue I will stand
Till death hath made me marble, oh, my fame,
Live in despite of murder, take thy wings
And haste thee where the grey-cyed morn perfumes
Her rosy chariot with Sabaeon spices,
Fly, where the evening from th' Iberian vales,
Takes on her swarthy shoulder Hecate,
Crowned with a grove of oaks, fly where men feel
The cunning axletree, and those that suffer
Beneath the chariot of the snowy Bear
And tell them all that D'Ambois now is hasting
To the eternal dwellers

There is no other last speech like that in Elizabethan drama "Oh, my fame, live in despite of murder" recalls Hamlet's wish that his memory might be vindicated; but Hamlet does not confide it to the universe, but to Horatio, mortal like himself.

“ROYAL MAN”

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story

The difference is great, the difference between an imagination which penetrates deep into human life, and one which is concentrated upon a great idea. The essential thing about Chapman's heroes, as about Marlowe's, is that they are framed of the four elements, not that they are human beings obliged to live somehow with other human beings, they are nearer to earth, water, air and fire than to us as we know ourselves. Marlowe gives the concoction from which Chapman's heroes were drawn:

Nature that fram'd us of four elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds

For Marlowe's poetry, too, like Chapman's, is inspired by a philosophical idea of man, not by human life as the observer sees it. His idea at first seems to be much the same as Chapman's, but in reality is very different, for though like Chapman he is in love with freedom and glory, he is also in love with their rewards, with

the ripest fruit of all
• That perfect bliss and sole felicity,
The sweet fruition of an earthly crown

Chapman's heroes have no ambition to achieve an earthly crown. They love freedom and glory disinterestedly as states of the soul, for their own and for the soul's sake. Their aspiring minds reach for a state in which freedom and glory are possessed purely, without admixture, as things in themselves. Bussy does not try to gain power over others, but merely to live after the pattern of "royal man". Byron is drawn into

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plots against his king, but his hostility is nothing more than that of a man who feels he is a king against another who merely is one. His plots bring him to the scaffold, they also precipitate his spiritual tragedy, for he can no longer enjoy freedom and glory in their purity after he has yielded to private ambition and envy. He is an unfallen man who yields to the persuasions of the fallen and becomes one of them, greater than them still, but no longer different from them. He loses his native noblesse by trying to win the noblesse of this world.

We do not come to know Bussy and Byron morally, for they are never affected by the action, never tested by it; but we do come to know what morality is—or what morality is to Chapman—through their mouths. That morality is a passionate, disinterested devotion to freedom and glory, the

Doing those deeds that fit eternity

Chapman carried his idea of freedom and glory to excess, no doubt, but excess was at the root of his virtues

Since I am free,
(Offending no just law), let no law make
By any wrong it does, my life her slave
When I am wrong'd, and that law fails to right me,
Let me be king myself (as man was made),
And do a justice that exceeds the law

Chapman's conception of morality is partial: in concentrating on greatness it pays little attention to goodness. But it is disinterested, it rises above the very thought of expediency, and takes us into the region of absolute things

THE POLITICS OF *KING LEAR*¹

DURING the past few weeks I have been reading every now and then the collected essays of the great teacher and scholar in whose memory these lectures are held. They delighted but daunted me; for the massive equipment of learning which is handled in them with such ease is far beyond my command. I have come to books when I could, in the intervals of a life spent on other things, many of them not of my choosing; books have not been my occupation. But I console myself with the thought that every critic, however learned, must—for he cannot help it—bring to his interpretation of works of imagination not only his reading, but his life, the experiences he has passed through, the emotions he has felt, the reflections he has made upon them, even the accidents and trivialities of every day, since they are all parts of life and help us, therefore, to comprehend the poet's image of life.

In what I say to-day I do not intend to touch upon the more profound aspects of *King Lear*, though I hope my argument may have some reference to them. I want to speak of the politics of the play, and these naturally must have some relation to Shakespeare's politics. That, of course, is a difficult problem, and a great deal has been written about it by critics ancient and modern; from Coleridge to the late John Palmer and Dr Tillyard in his last two volumes. I shall not try to summarise the arguments of these writers. But one point is crucial, and has been brought up repeatedly, and I should like to say a few words about it. Briefly,

¹ The W P Ker lecture for 1946, given in the University of Glasgow

it has been maintained that Shakespeare had no politics. Now this may be true in a sense, if it means that he cannot be put down either as a Conservative, or a Liberal, or a Socialist, or whatever the counterparts of these modern classifications were in his time. I shall not use these terms, or adopt Swinburne's opinion that *King Lear* is the work of Shakespeare the Socialist: Swinburne was speaking rhetorically. But a man may have political sense, and political sense of a high kind, without falling into any of these categories, for his mind, while working politically, may not think in terms of any of them. To say that Shakespeare had no politics—if one takes the statement seriously—can only mean that he had no conception of what is good in society; and to assert that would bring an immediate denial from everybody. It has been said that he was above the conflict; it would be more true to say that he was above the classification. For he had very strongly a conception of what is good in society, just as he had very strongly a sense of what is good in conduct. Professor Caroline Spurgeon demonstrates this in her analysis of the Histories, but it seems to me that the play in which it is most clearly evident is *King Lear*.

To understand the Tragedies and the Histories one has to keep in mind the historical background of Shakespeare's age. I cannot attempt to describe that background, and must indicate it in a sort of historical shorthand by enumerating a few dates. The Dissolution of the Monasteries, which rang the warning that the old medieval order was nearing its end, was completed in 1539, twenty-five years before Shakespeare's birth. *King Lear* was written round about 1605-6, six or seven years after the birth of Cromwell and forty-three before the execution of Charles I. In the interval between the first and the last of these dates the medieval world with its communal tradition was dying, and the

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modern individualist world was bringing itself to birth Shakespeare lived in that violent period of transition. The old world still echoed in his ears, he was aware of the new as we are aware of the future, that is as an inchoate, semi-prophetic dream. Now it seems to me that that dream, those echoes, fill *King Lear* and account for the sense of vastness which it gives us, the feeling that it covers a far greater stretch of time than can be explained by the action. The extreme age of the King brings to our minds the image of a civilisation of legendary antiquity, yet that civilisation is destroyed by a new generation which belongs to Shakespeare's own time, a perfectly up-to-date gang of Renaissance adventurers. The play contains, therefore, or has taken on, a significance which Shakespeare probably could not have known, and without his being aware, he wrote in it the mythical drama of the transmutation of civilization. One is reminded of the scene in the second part of Goethe's *Faust* where the temples of the ancient world change and crumble and rise again in the towering Gothic structures of the Middle Ages.

Of the great tragedies *King Lear* is the only one in which two ideas of society are directly confronted, and the old generation and the new are set face to face, each assured of its own right to power. *Macbeth* is a drama of murder and usurpation and remorse, it changes the succession of the crown and brings guilt upon the offender, the guilt showing that the old order is still accepted, and the old laws still valid, since Macbeth feels that he has done wrong both as the killer of a man and the supplanter of a king. But Regan, Goneril and Cornwall never feel that they have done wrong, and this is because they represent a new idea; and new ideas, like everything new, bring with them their own kind of innocence. *Hamlet*, although it deals with a dynastic and therefore a political problem, is essentially

a personal drama, perhaps the most personal of them all. there is no relationship in *King Lear* so intensely intimate as that of Hamlet to his mother. Lear's own relation to his daughters is most nearly so, yet Goneril and Regan are curiously equal in his estimation, indeed almost interchangeable; he is willing to accept either if she will only take his part against her sister, and as if his rage had blotted out their very names, he confounds them indistinguishably in his curses upon his daughters, so that we feel that daughters have become to him some strange and monstrous species. To Goneril and Regan, on the other hand, he is hardly even a father, but merely an old man who thinks and feels in a way they cannot understand, and is a burden to them. The almost impersonal equivalence of the two women in their father's eyes gives a cast to the play which is not to be found in any of the others, and so makes us feel, indeed, that Lear is not contending with ordinary human beings but with mere forces to which any human appeal is vain, since it is not even capable of evoking a response. He, the representative of the old, is confronted with something brand new; he cannot understand it, and it does not even care to understand him.

There is something more, then, than ingratitude in the reaction of Lear's daughters, though the ingratitude, that "marble-hearted fiend", strikes most deeply into his heart. This something more is their attitude to power, which is grounded on their attitude to life. It is this, more than the ingratitude, that estranges Lear from them. His appeals cannot reach them, but, worse still, his mind cannot understand them, no matter how hard he tries. As this attitude of his daughters violates all his ideas of the nature of things, it seems to him against nature, so that he can only cry out against them as "unnatural hags". "Unnatural" is the nearest he can come to a definition of the unbridgeable distance

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that divides him from them; his real struggle is to annihilate that distance, but he never succeeds, in his most intimate conflict with them he never comes any closer to them. When Regan shuts him out in the storm her action is symbolical as well as practical. His daughters are inside, he is outside. They are in two different worlds.

The story of *King Lear* tells how an old man parts his kingdom between his daughters when he feels no longer able to rule. He retains to himself only

The name and all the additions to a king,
and leaves to them and their husbands

The sway, revenue, execution of the rest

His daughters, having got what they want, that is the power, and not caring much for the name or the additions, turn against him. As daughters, their act is one of filial ingratitude, as princesses and vice-regents, it is an act of "revolt and flying off." These two aspects of their policy are inseparable, in turning against their father they subvert the kingdom, by the same deed they commit two crimes, one private and one public.

But there is a complication. For Goneril and Regan's idea of rulership is different from their father's, and so, on the anguish caused by their ingratitude, is piled the bewilderment of one who feels he is dealing with creatures whose notions are equally incomprehensible to his heart and his mind. In the later stages of the conflict it is the tortures of his mind that become the most unbearable, since they make the nature of things incomprehensible to him, and confound his ideas in a chaos from which the only escape is madness. The note of *Lear's* tragedy is to be found in another play:

Chaos is come again

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The note of the play itself, the summary judgment on the whole action, is expressed in Albany's words

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep

Yet this is the world which Lear's two daughters and Cornwall and Edmund and Oswald freely accept as theirs, it is their idea of a brand-new order, and the play therefore deals not only with a conflict between two daughters and their father, and two vice-regents and their king, but with two conceptions of society

In the new conception of society, that of Goneril and Regan, nature plays an important part, the number of references to nature in the play, almost always as images of cruelty or horror, has often been commented upon. Bradley in his book on Shakespearean tragedy tries to make a list of the lower animals which are mentioned in the drama, a list which had afterwards to be completed by Professor Spurgeon. "These references are broadcast through the whole play", he says, "as though Shakespeare's mind were so busy with the subject that he could hardly write a page without some allusion to it. The dog, the horse, the cow, the sheep, the hog, the lion, the bear, the wolf, the fox, the monkey, the pole-cat, the civet-cat, the pelican, the owl, the crow, the chough, the wren, the fly, the butterfly, the rat, the mouse, the frog, the tadpole, the wall-newt, the water-newt, the worm—I am sure I cannot have completed the list, and some of them are mentioned again and again. Sometimes a person in the drama is compared, openly or implicitly, with one of them. Goneril is a kite; her ingratitude has a serpent tooth: she has struck her father most serpentlike upon the

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very heart: her visage is wolfish· she has tied sharp-toothed unkindness like a vulture on her father's breast: for her husband she is a gilded serpent. to Gloster her cruelty seems to have the fangs of a boar She and Regan are dog-hearted they are tigers, not daughteis; each is an adder to the other, the flesh of each is covered with the fell of a beast . As we read, the souls of all the beasts in turn seem to us to have entered the bodies of these mortals, horrible in their venom, savagery, lust, deceitfulness, sloth, cruelty, filthiness "

After looking on this picture of nature, turn to the first speech of Edmund, the mouthpiece of the new generation·

Thou, Nature, art my goddess, to thy law
My services are bound Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
Lag of a brother? Why bastard? wherefore base?
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?
Who in the lusty stealth of nature take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed,
Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops,
Got 'tween asleep and wake? Well then,
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to the legitimate Fine word, "legitimate"!

Goneril and Regan and Cornwall, though they do not have Edmund's imaginative intellect, worship nature in the same spirit. For it gives them the freedom they hunger for, absolves them from the plague of custom,

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justifies them when they reflect that their dimensions are well-compact and their shape true, as if that were all that was needed to make human a creature in human shape. They rely confidently on certain simple facts of nature: that they are young and their father old, strong while he is infirm, and that their youth and strength give them a short cut to their desires. They are so close to the state of nature that they hardly need to reflect: what they have the power to do they claim the right to do. Or rather the power and its expression in action are almost simultaneous. When Lear pleads with Goneril she replies

Be then desired
By her, that else will take the thing she begs,
A little to disquantity your train

Regan says a little later:

I pray you, father, being weak, seem so

After Cornwall puts out Gloster's eyes, and Regan stabs the servant who tried to prevent it, he says.

Turn out that eyeless villain, throw this slave
Upon the dunghill

And Regan adds.

Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell
His way to Dover

The most repulsive thing about these words, apart from their cruelty, is their triteness. The two daughters ignore all the complexities of the situation, and solve it at once by an abominable truism. They are quite rational, but only on the lowest plane of reason, and they have that contempt for other ways of thinking

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which comes from a knowledge of their own efficiency. As they are rational, they have a good conscience, even a touch of self-righteousness, they sincerely believe their father is in the wrong and they are in the right, since they conceive they know the world as it is, and act in conformity with it, the source of all effective power. They do not see far, but they see clearly. When they reflect, and take thought for the future, their decisions are rational and satisfactory by their own standards. When Goneril wants an excuse for reducing her father's retinue, she instructs her servant Oswald how to behave towards him.

Put on what weary negligence you please,
You and your fellows, I'd have it come to question
And let his knights have colder looks among you,
What grows of it, no matter, advise your fellows so,
I would breed from hence occasions, and I shall,
That I may speak

This is a technique which we have seen much practised in our own time

The members of the new generation are bound together by common interest, since they all wish to succeed in their individual ambitions, which they cannot achieve without help, but their most immediate bond is a common way of thinking, a spontaneous intellectual affinity resembling that of a chosen group to whom a new vision of the world has been vouchsafed. They feel they are of the elect and have the sense of superiority which fits their station. But they are irresistibly driven to choose as confederates men and women of their own stamp, even though these are likely in the long run to thwart or destroy them. Having renounced morality as a useful factor in conduct, they judge others with a total lack of moral discrimination, being confined irretrievably to the low plane of reason on which they

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move Accordingly Cornwall can say to Edmund:

You shall be ours
Natures of such deep trust we shall much need,
You we first seize on

And of honest Kent:

This is some fellow,
Who, having been praised for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb
Quite from his nature he cannot flatter, he,
An honest mind and plain, he must speak truth
An they will take it, so, if not, he's plain
These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness
Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends
Than twenty silly-ducking observants,
That stretch their duties nicely

Lear could not have made these mistakes, for he had some knowledge of the moral nature of man; but Cornwall and Goneril and Regan can and do; for while they have worked out the equation of life with complete satisfaction to themselves, they have done so by omitting the moral factor

The new generation may be regarded then as the embodiment of wickedness, a wickedness of that special kind which I have tried to indicate But can it also be said that they represent a new conception of society? If we had not lived through the last twenty years, had not seen the rise of Fascism in Italy and Germany, and did not know the theory and practice by which it was upheld, we might be disposed to deny this As it is we cannot We know, too, that Shakespeare was acquainted with the Renaissance man, and that his plays abound in references to "policy", which stood in his time for what the Germans dignify by the name of *Realpolitik*; that is, political action which ignores all moral considerations In Burckhardt's account of the

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lives of the Roman *condottieri* there is ground enough for believing that figures like Goneril and Regan could both behave as they did and rule a state. It was an age in which Italian princes, and others too, permitted themselves a liberty of action which one would have expected to disrupt or destroy the state; yet it did not. Instead, the subject conformed to a rulership which seemed impossible because anti-social, he conformed by becoming the mere instrument of his ruler. The Macchiavellian became a stock figure in later Elizabethan drama; Shakespeare must have met many a man like Edmund who refused to be deprived by the plague of custom. Bradley calls Edmund a mere adventurer, yet afterwards describes him as a consummate politician in the new style. "He acts in pursuance of a purpose," says Bradley, "and if he has any affections or dislikes, ignores them. He is determined to make his way, first to his brother's lands, then—as the prospect widens—to the crown, and he regards men and women, with their virtues and vices, together with the bonds of kinship, friendship, or allegiance, merely as hindrances or helps to his end. They are for him divested of all quality except for their relation to his end; as indifferent as mathematical quantities or mere physical agents.

A credulous father, and a brother noble,
I see the business,

he says, as if he were talking of x and y "

To regard things in this way is to see them in a continuous present divested of all associations, denuded of memory and the depth which memory gives to life. Goneril and Regan, even more than Edmund, exist in this shallow present, and it is to them a present in both senses of the word, a gift freely given into their hands to do with what they like. Having no memory, they have no responsibility, and no need, therefore, to treat

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their father differently from any other troublesome old man. This may simply be another way of saying that they are evil, for it may be that evil consists in a hiatus in the soul, a craving blank, a lack of one of the essential threads which bind experience into a coherent whole and give it a consistent meaning. The hiatus in Lear's daughters is specifically a hiatus of memory, a breach in continuity, they seem to come from nowhere and to be on the way to nowhere, they have words and acts only to meet the momentary emergency, the momentary appetite, their speech is therefore strikingly deficient in imagery, and consists of a sequence of pitiless truisms. Bradley complains of the characters in the play that, "Considered simply as psychological studies few of them are of the highest interest". This is true of Goneril and Regan, for the human qualities of highest interest are left out of them. But that was Shakespeare's intention, he had to interest us in two characters who were both evil and shallow. Their shallowness is ultimately that of the Macchiavellian view of life as it was understood in his age, of "policy", or *Realpolitik*, whichever we may choose to call it. The sisters are harpies, but as rulers they act in the approved contemporary Macchiavellian convention. If we read Burckhardt, if we reflect that Macchiavellianism was a current preoccupation in Shakespeare's time, and consider further that the Renaissance gave to the individual a prominence he had not possessed since classical times, and that personal power, especially in princes, appeared sometimes to be boundless, we need not shrink from regarding Edmund and his confederates as political types. Poets of Shakespeare's time had espoused the liberated hero, the glorious individual, among them Marlowe, and Chapman with his ideal of "royal man". But Shakespeare did not: his political sense put him on the opposite side.

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To understand his attitude to the new generation we must finally consider his identification of them with nature. Their life in the moment, their decisions based on what the mere moment presents, their want of continuity, their permanent empty newness, are sufficient in themselves to involve them with nature, for nature is always new and has no background, it is society that is old. Their position may be defined by saying that they claim a liberty which is proper to nature but not to society. This is what makes them in a sense unnatural; and this is what makes it impossible for Lear with his traditional beliefs to understand them. Nature is not corrupt in itself, nor is man as Shakespeare normally sees him, but when man is swallowed up in nature a result is produced which seems to corrupt both. Goneril, Regan and Cornwall become mere animals furnished with human faculties which they have stolen, not inherited by right. Words are their teeth and claws, and action the technique of the deadly spring. It may be that this new freedom, the freedom of nature not of civilised humanity, pointed to the development which society was to follow, to *laissez-faire* and the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest so dear to the Victorian economists: but I have no time to follow it there.

Against this idea of society what had Lear to set? His conception is nowhere clearly formulated, for it is old, and it is to him the accepted conception. But in almost everything he says, whether in anger or kindness, we can feel what it is: he sets against the idea of natural freedom the sacred tradition of human society. His attitude to nature when he is in his right mind is quite objective:

Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's

He himself does not turn to nature for help until his

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folly is let in and his dear judgment out, and then he asks her, the terrible goddess, to fulfil his curse on Goneril:

If she must teem,
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
To be a thwart disnatured torment to her!
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
With cadent tears fict channels in her cheeks,
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!

Later, when his mind is tortured by the problem of his daughters' insensibility, his speculations on nature take on a darker colour:

Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her
heart! Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard
hearts?

The more forlorn his state becomes, the more he feels the indifference and cruelty of nature even in small things:

The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me

He sees clearly what man is in his natural state, and describes him after he meets Edgar in his rags.

Is man no more than this? Consider him well! Thou
owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool,
the cat no perfume! Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated,
thou art the thing itself, unaccommodated man is no more but
such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art

Yet for Lear and his friends there exists an order of society so obviously springing from the nature and needs of man that it can also be called natural, though

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not in Edmund's sense. When it is subverted, the universal frame seems to be wrenched from its place, and the new chaos can be explained only as the result of a portent. Gloucester argues:

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide. In cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. We have seen the best of our time machinations, hollownness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves.

Kent exclaims

It is the stars,
The stars above us, govern our conditions,
Else one self mate and make could not beget
Such different issues

Gloucester and Kent needed such explanations, for division between brothers, mutinies, discords, treacheries did not seem to them in accordance with the nature of society. But to Edmund this state is the natural one, for it gives him an opportunity to rise, and so he can sneer almost virtuously at his father's superstitions:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeit of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars, as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence, and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail, and my nativity was under *Ursa major*, so that it follows I am

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rough and lecherous Fut! I should have been that I am
had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my
bastardizing

Edmund can say this because he is a child of nature,
and a liar, adulterer and traitor by free choice, for
each furthers his advancement

The tradition of society which Lear represents is
difficult to reconstruct from anything that is said in the
play Its nature is implied in Lear's appeals to his
daughters

'Tis not in thee
To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
And, in conclusion, to oppose the bolt
Against my coming in thou better know'st
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude

It is to such things that Lear appeals when he is
trying to find a way to his daughters. He appeals to a
sentiment which to him means everything, but which
to them means nothing: they do not even understand it.
His conception of society can be guessed at again in
the words which he says to his Fool out of his own
grief

Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
That's sorry yet for thee

We can guess at it again in these words which made
Swinburne write of Shakespeare the Socialist:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O! I have ta'en
Too little care of this Take physic, pomp,

THE POLITICS OF *KING LEAR*

Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just

The difference between that and

I pray you, father, being weak, seem so,

or

Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell
His way to Dover,

is the difference between the two worlds described in the play. Lear is an imperfect king, he has taken too little care for his subjects, but he admits the obligation; and the social realities on which he relies, and to which he appeals as if they were self-evident, are purely human, not realistic in the modern sense.

The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude

If we discern a conception of society behind such fragmentary utterances, and behind Lear himself, it appears to us a society bound together not by force and appetite, but by a sort of piety and human fitness, a natural piety, one would feel inclined to say, if the word were not used in the play as inimical to society.

Lear is very old, almost Saturnian in his legendary age; the kingdom in him exists as a memory and no longer as a fact, the old order lies in ruin, and the new, is not an order. The communal tradition, filled with memory, has been smashed by an individualism that exists in its perpetual shallow present. The judgment on the new generation is passed by a member of it who does not belong spiritually to it: Edgar. It is remarkable that in the scenes where Lear, the Fool and Edgar are together, it is Edgar, the only sane man, who conjures up the deepest images of horror. For he is of the new generation, and knows it as Lear cannot.

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When Lear asks him who he is, he replies by giving a portrait of his brother Edmund

A servingman, proud in heart and mind, that curled my hair, wore gloves in my cap, served the lust of my mistress' heart, and did the act of darkness with her, swore as many oaths as I spake words, and broke them in the sweet face of heaven, one that slept in the contriving of lust, and waked to do it Wine loved I deeply, dice dearly, and in woman out-paramoured the Turk false of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand, hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey

That is a picture of an animal with human faculties, made corrupt and legendary by the proudly curled hair. It is a picture, too, of the man of policy in the latest style, who regards the sacred order of society as his prey, and recognises only two realities, interest and force, the gods of the new age

LAURENCE STERNE

“THEY order, said I, this matter better in France ”
It is one of the most perfect openings to an English book. It sets the key of *A Sentimental Journey*, and is like one of those themes which preordain all the forms into which a musical composition will flow. It raises us to the level where the book will stay; it has the force of an incantation.

From a phrase such as this the mystery of Sterne's operation on our minds can be realised, and almost any other might have served as well, for his operation is the operation of pure style. It is style that creates the world of *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*. In most novels we can roughly separate form and content, treatment and subject-matter, but in these two books they are indivisible; there seems to be no hiatus between intention and execution. They stand on a plane of their own in English fiction, as triumphs of reason and imagination over subject-matter.

Or Sterne's feat might be described by saying that from beginning to end his utterance is as completely in character as the part of a great comic figure on the stage. Nothing can disturb his inflection. He may lecture his readers, or argue with them, or coquette with them, or overlook them; but always he is in his part. This is the reason why, though he is far more ubiquitous than Fielding, his presence is never intrusive. He knew that everything in a work of art must be given a reason, and he made his position secure by making himself indispensable to his characters. He invented for himself a void which only his own figure could fill, so that with-

out him we feel that Mr Shandy, Uncle Toby, Trim and the others would remain in eternal silence and immobility, and never think of the things they say. He is their Boswell. He feeds them with curious questions and busily notes the answers, appearing at their heels as a benevolent familiar. And out of this fictitious function he contrives to charm another, that of the worried guardian. For he can never quite catch up with all his charges, he has to leave one to run after another, or soliloquise on the impossibility of attending to them all, or appeal to the reader for help. In this way he finds a host of urgent reasons for appearing in the centre of the stage, reasons absurd in themselves, perhaps, yet essential to his plan. While Fielding in his few appearances has the air of a gentlemanly intruder.

Yet this still does not do justice to Sterne. For he never appears except in his literary character, except, that is to say, as a stylised portrait of himself, imaginatively conceived like the other figures. Fielding comes on simply as the self-conscious author, or the eighteenth-century English gentleman. His gesture is as disconcerting as that of certain music-hall entertainers at the end of a turn. We know the feeling of discomfort when, after watching a figure on the stage universalised by paint and wig, a wigless, well-groomed young man scuttles out from the wings and bows. A precious illusion is destroyed to draw attention to an ordinary fact. Fielding's introductory chapters to his books dispel the illusion by suggesting the gentleman. His pleasant manly features are presented to us, and we are expected to remember them when in the next chapter the mere novelist comes on.

Novelists have a habit of appearing at unforeseen moments in their own characters; the novel is an accommodating art and can stand it; but it is Sterne's

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avoidance of this vice which puts him on his own plane of perfection in English fiction. For by appearing only as his imaginative portrait in *Tristram Shandy*, he renounces the luxury of being himself, he never claims the reader's sympathies in the touching role of a human being. He is never a man, a gentleman, a husband, a father, a citizen, a clergyman. He is continuously encased in motley, and painted and wigged, every gesture and intonation is stylised; and Laurence Sterne is resolved into an imaginative sublimation of himself. This mime has of course a whole range of ideas, a whole gamut of emotions, entirely congruous with it, feels hope, disappointment, contentment, pity, laughs and cries. But it is not Sterne who laughs and cries, but this double which both follows the lines of its original and cancels them, like a mask. And we have only to remember that this mask is never laid aside, that it usurps entirely the place of its original, which disappears altogether, for the fabulous quality of Sterne's art to become comprehensible. Perhaps the best analogy for Sterne's masked personality can be found among Shakespeare's court jesters, he is like those half-fabulous creatures who are never out of their motley, who, we feel, are not parted from it even when they are asleep, and who will die as they have lived in it. And because the call before the curtain never comes, because the paint and the wig have grown into skin and hair, we are transported into a magical world, into a non-stop performance on the stage of some cosmic Empire or Palladium.

This is Sterne's world; it is the world also of Shakespeare's comic characters; but, except for these, few have entered it. It is a world which can be thrown open only by complete masquerade or disguise, for disguise is a magical art. It not only enables us to do things which, with our own features presented to the world,

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we would not permit ourselves to do, or dare not do; it not only gives us licence to be irresponsible, undignified, outspoken it sets free in us a new personality with a suppleness and daring of movement which seems to belong to the dream-world Sterne is the freest of English comic writers, and freest in the sense of being the readiest, the most quickly, airily and subtly moving. In that freedom thought is indistinguishable from condensed fancy, and fancy from subtilised thought. Take his description of his meeting with the French lady at Calais He seized her hand, then it escaped him, then he captured it again

The pulsation of the arteries along my fingers pressing across hers, told her what was passing within me, she looked down—a silence of some moments followed I fear, in this interval, I must have made some slight effort towards a closer compression of her hand, from a subtle sensation I felt in the palm of my own—not as if she was going to withdraw hers—but, as if she thought about it—and I had infallibly lost it a second time, had not instinct more than reason directed me to the last resource in these dangers—to hold it loosely, and as if I was every moment going to release it of myself, so she let it continue

That is a passage which one might find in Proust, except that it is quite unlike Proust in that we cannot tell whether its exactitude is one of fancy or of observation It moves along two routes simultaneously, and has a sort of enigmatical, interchangeable truth applicable equally to our world and a world of pure fancy It suggests two things at once, the intellectual analysis of the modern novel, and the intellectual imagination of the metaphysical poets. Through what seems to be pure invention Donne reaches truths about experience which we feel could be reached in no other way. Through intellectual fantasy Sterne does the same

thing. And, like Donne and Proust, his aim is to find the intelligible and the spiritual in minute manifestations of the physical, to bring a greater province of experience under the rule of intellectual law.

So that perhaps this licence to pause over trifling or minute things was the most valuable prerogative which the freedom of motley gave him. It allowed him to follow out at his ease processes which Fielding with his instinct for balance, and Smollett with his practical temper, would have passed over with contempt: the transmutations of the homunculus, the size of noses, Uncle Toby's groin and Widow Wadman's eye. It allowed him to show that "preference for the windings of his own mind to the guide-book with its hammered high road", which, Virginia Woolf tells us, makes him "singularly of our own age". His eyes, she says again, "were so adjusted that small things often bulked larger than big". But in the perspective of the new world into which his paint and wig had got him it would be truer to say that everything, large and small, existed on an equality, and made up a fantastic republic. That world, being new, was not yet covered by the scales of custom and convention; the mind was free to consider every object in it. This ubiquity of interest is at the root of Sterne's humour, and nowhere more clearly than in the well-known incident of Uncle Toby and the fly.

"Go," says he, one day at dinner, to an overgrown one which had buzzed about his nose, and tormented him cruelly all dinner time, and which, after infinite attempts, he had caught at last, as it flew past him — "I'll not hurt thee," says my Uncle Toby, rising from his chair, and going across the room with the fly in his hand, "I'll not hurt a hair of thy head. Go," says he, lifting up the sash, and opening his hand as he spoke, to let it escape, "go, poor devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee? This world is surely wide enough to hold both thee and me."

The force of this passage resides in its grasp of an unconventional relation between two living creatures, in a tender jogging of our minds, hardened by custom. Uncle Toby's action springs from an intuition of justice which only Sterne's mind could have discerned. There is this intellectual justification behind most of the passages which are blamed for their sentimentality or their licentiousness. What gives a peculiar fascination to these two qualities in his work, making them different from mere sentimentality and mere licentiousness, is that they spring from imaginative curiosity. The same insatiable intelligence which told him that asses and flies had their place, told him that the homunculus and the vital spirits had their place too, and what Thackeray called his "latent corruption" was often the seeing of things in a novel perspective, the intuition that everything has its function and deserves its share of attention: homunculi and flies no less than asses and men.

It was Sterne's paint and wig and motley that got him into this world. What were the arts which he employed in it with such effect? They consisted of a few tricks as old as the vocation of the jester. The first was the pose of having so many difficulties to overcome that you cannot do what you want to do, another was that of having so much to tell that in following out this or that line you lose your way. The first was the favourite device of Grock, the second, that of Miss Bates in Jane Austen's *Emma*. Sterne rehearses over and over Grock's little act with the piano. First the piano is too far from the stool, so, with great labour, it has to be shifted, then the stool is too high, then too low; then one's feet cannot be accommodated; then some other unforeseen difficulty arises; but that is overcome too, for one is resolved to play. Sterne never gets to the stage of sitting down for long to his piece. With a great effort he does manage to get his

hero born and misnamed; but then urgent interruptions crowd upon him; Tristram's parents, Tristram's uncle, the doctor who brought him into the world, the servants who assisted, have all to be attended to; for how is it possible to tell anything of Tristram if they are not disposed of first? But they are never disposed of, they are inexhaustible; and from them he is drawn aside by such things as noses, which also turn out to be inexhaustible. It is this inexhaustibility of things which calls Miss Bates into action. She suffers from an impossible discursiveness of interest. Everything that she mentions has the power of suggesting everything else, so that when she sets out to make one statement, she sets out to make every statement. Sterne check-mates her by a masterly employment of the parenthetical sentence, resulting in a series of Pyrrhic victories. So it goes on, with Grock peacefully and indefatigably obstructing the action, Miss Bates trying to say everything at once, and Sterne deploying his parenthetical sentence so well that she is checked perpetually on the frontier of incoherence.

From this description, Sterne's method seems the most impossible ever invented by a novelist. Yet it was out of the impossibilities that he snatched the triumphs of his art. All his divagations are short cuts. The struggle with insurmountable obstacles, the perpetual losing of the thread of the story to get everything, in, are merely his devices for building up an image of the contradictoriness and variety of life. This image is produced not merely by what is said or what is told, but by the form of the work itself. Consequently he can as justly be called the most economical as the most wasteful of writers. Yet about his mastery of form there can be no doubt, for it is clear that he did exactly what he wanted to do, and one cannot imagine the pattern of his books as being other than it is; it may

appear arbitrary, but it is inevitable

Nevertheless it has a very peculiar kind of inevitability, the inevitability of a maze which while following the most exact laws of structure seems continuously to violate their purpose. *Tristram Shandy* is perhaps the only novel in the English language which is humorous in its construction, humorous, that is to say, through and through. And this means that what Sterne created was not merely a few comic figures inhabiting the world of ordinary fact, as Fielding and Scott and Dickens did, but a world of comic entities in which not merely his human figures, but everything from man down to the homunculus, are forms of humour. That world is as much a creation of poetic genius as the forest of Arden or the wood near Athens. And this is why Uncle Toby and Mr. Shandy have been so often called Shakespearean, they live like Falstaff and Bottom in a world of free comic entities, not in the world of actual knocks and blows, like Fielding's Partridge or Smollett's Commodore Truncheon. They are not figures of comedy in a picture of society, but naturals of humour in a world of universal forces.

BURNS AND POPULAR POETRY

FOR a Scotsman to see Burns simply as a poet is almost impossible. Burns is so deeply imbedded in Scottish life that he cannot be detached from it, from what is best in it and what is worst in it, and regarded as we regard Dunbar or James Hogg or Walter Scott. He is more a personage to us than a poet, more a figurehead than a personage, and more a myth than a figurehead. To those who have heard of Dunbar he is a figure, of course, comparable to Dunbar; but he is also a figure comparable to Prince Charlie, about whom every one has heard. He is a myth evolved by the popular imagination, a communal poetic creation, a Protean figure; we can all shape him to our own likeness, for a myth is endlessly adaptable, so that to the respectable this secondary Burns is a decent man; to the Rabelaisian, bawdy; to the sentimentalist, sentimental, to the Socialist, a revolutionary; to the Nationalist, a patriot, to the religious, pious; to the self-made man, self-made, to the drinker, a drinker. He has the power of making any Scotsman, whether generous or canny, sentimental or prosaic, religious or profane, more whole-heartedly himself than he could have been without assistance, and in that way perhaps more human. He greases our wheels, we could not roll on our way so comfortably but for him, and it is impossible to judge impartially a convenient appliance to which we have grown accustomed.

The myth is unlike the man; but the man was its basis, and no other could have served. We cannot imagine Wordsworth or Shelley or Tennyson or Shake-

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speare turning into a popular myth, and Burns did so because his qualities made it possible, and because he deserved it. No other writer has said so fully and expressly what every man of his race wanted him to say, no other writer, consequently, has been taken so completely into the life of a people. The myth may in some ways be absurd, but it is as solid as the agreement which rises in Scotsmen's minds whenever Burns utters one of his great platitudes

"O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!"

"The hert aye's the part aye
That makes us right or wrang "

"The best laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft a-gley "

When the Burnsites are assembled on the Night, they feel Burns invisibly present among them as one of themselves, a great man who by some felicitous stroke has been transformed into an ordinary man, and is the greater because of it—a man indeed more really, more universally ordinary than any mere ordinary man could ever hope to be. This feeling is a tribute to Burns' humanity; it is a claim to kinship, it is also a grateful recognition that here is a poet for everybody, a poet who has such an insight into ordinary thoughts and feelings that he can catch them and give them poetic shape, as those who merely think or feel them cannot. This was Burns' supreme art. It seems to be simple. People are inclined to believe that it is easier to express ordinary thoughts and feelings in verse than complex and unusual ones. The problem is an artificial one, for in the end a poet does what he has a supreme gift for doing. Burns' gift lay there, it made him a myth;

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it predestined him to become the Rabbie of Burns Nights. When we consider Burns we must therefore include the Burns Nights with him, and the Burns cult in all its forms, if we sneer at them, we sneer at Burns. They are his reward, or his punishment (whichever the fastidious reader may prefer to call it) for having had the temerity to express the ordinary feelings of his people, and for having become a part of their life. What the Burns Nights ignore is the perfection of Burns' art, which makes him one of the great poets. But there is so much more involved that this, his real greatness, is scarcely taken into account.

Ordinary thoughts and feelings are not necessarily shallow, any more than subtle and unusual ones are necessarily profound. It may be said that Burns was never shallow and never profound. He did not have

Those thoughts that wander through eternity
which consoled Milton's Belial in Hell, and he could not be shallow as Tennyson sometimes was. He was sentimental, but sentimental with a certain solidity and grossness, there is genuine feeling behind his mawkishness, not merely a sick refinement of sensibility striving to generate the illusion of feeling. He could rise to the full height of the ordinary, where simplicity and greatness meet

“Thou'll break my heart, thou bonie bird,
That sings beside thy mate,
For sae I sat, and sae I sang,
And wist na o' my fate”

His rhetoric, his humour, his satire, his platitude have all the same solidity, the same devastating common sense. There is a great difference between *A Man's a Man for a' that* and

“Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood.”

The one speaks positively to us, the other says nothing. Burns became as amorphous as a myth because he was as solid as a ploughman. He became legendary because he was so startlingly ordinary. He was the ordinary man for whom Scotland had been looking as it might have looked for a king, and it discovered him with greater surprise and delight than if it had found a king, for kings are more common. His poetry embodied the obvious in its universal form, the obvious in its essence and its truth, the discovery of which is one of the perennial surprises of mankind. If Burns' poetry had not been obvious, he could never have become the national poet of Scotland.

But the national poet of Scotland is too conventional a term for him, the poet of the Scottish people is better, for all claim him. And by the people I do not mean merely the ploughman and the factory worker and the grocer's assistant, but the lawyer, the business man, the minister, the bailie—all that large class of Scotsmen who are not very interested in literature, not very cultivated, and know little poetry outside the poetry of Burns. It is these who have fashioned the popular image of Burns, and this is what really happens when a poet is taken into the life of a people. He moulds their thoughts and feelings, but they mould his too, sometimes long after he is dead. They make current a vulgarised image of him, and a vulgarised reading of his poetry, they take him into their life, but they also enter into his, and what emerges as the popular picture is a cross between the two. What is good in this bargain is self-evident—that the words and thoughts and feelings of a great poet become the common property of his people. The disadvantages I have tried to describe; they are natural and inevitable; compared to the single great advantage they do not matter very much, unless to those who cannot endure a normal dose

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of vulgarity. But they exist, and those who are advocating a more popular note in poetry at present should take them into account. For Burns is an object-lesson in what poetic popularity really means—the prime object-lesson in the poetry of the world, perhaps the unique instance.

It is good, then, that there should be “poetry for the people”, as its advocates call it. But there is another side of the question, and I found it illustrated while turning over an old number of the *Criterion* the other day, and coming on an editorial note by Mr. T. S. Eliot. A letter by the Poet Laureate and his friends had appeared in *The Times* under the heading, “Art in the Inn”. Mr. Masfield proposed making use of the country public-house for “verse-speaking, drama and readings of prose, and thus encouraging a wider appreciation of our language and literature in its highest forms”. Mr. Eliot was disconcerted by this proposal, as a number of us would be; for he “had always thought of the public-house as one of the few places to which one could escape from verse-speaking, drama and readings of prose. If the public-house is to fall into the hands of the English Association and the British Drama League, where, one must ask bluntly, is a man to go for a drink?”

With this most people would agree, propaganda of this kind rests on a false basis, but Burns, at any rate, does not need it, when he is quoted or recited in pubs, the act is quite natural and spontaneous. But the more serious part of Mr. Eliot’s comment comes later. “I suspect that two distinct intentions, both laudable, have been confused. One is, that there should be a public for poetry. But what is important is not that this public should be large, but that it should be sensitive, critical and educated—conditions only possible for a small public. The other intention is, that people should

be made happier, and be given the best life of which they are capable I doubt whether poetry can be made to serve this purpose for the populace, if it ever does, it will never come as a result of centralised planning "

Now, when Mr Eliot doubts "whether poetry can be made to serve this purpose" (of giving people the best life of which they are capable), he is evidently thinking of poetry as everyone who takes it seriously thinks of it, the poetry, to guess at his own tastes, of Dante, Shakespeare, Webster, Donne, Dryden, Baudelaire, the French Symbolists; but the list can be indefinitely extended, and for the genuine lover of poetry it will include Burns, shorn of his popularity, a name of the same kind as those other great names If there is to be a public for these poets, and for what is good in the poetry of our own time, obviously Mr Eliot is right in saying that it must be "sensitive, critical and educated"; for without such a public poetry could not be preserved, and its traditions would be lost Mr Eliot asserts that this public is bound to be small, and no doubt that is so, but there is a fringe surrounding it which is not small, a working liaison between the discriminating few and the indiscriminating mass. Nothing can be done by propaganda or organisation to extend that fringe, but by merely existing it produces an effect among the mass which is different from the effect produced by popular poetry; for it is qualitative What the advocates of poetry for the people should aim at is the dissemination of a feeling for quality, not the production of poetry which will be read in greater and greater quantity This cannot be done by propaganda for popular poetry, but a beginning might be made by reform of our schools, where poetry is so often "taught" in a way to make the pupil dislike it and misunderstand it.

Burns exists in both worlds—the world of quality

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and the world of quantity. The world of quantity has grown so powerful and established such a firm hold on him that it is difficult to extricate him from its grip. He has certainly fulfilled one of the functions which Mr. Eliot doubted whether poetry could fulfil—"that people should be happier", he has done much more than that, and what he has done is good beyond doubt, with this limitation which does not apply to other poets—that he has not brought poetry to people, but simply Burns. It may be that Burns is enough for many people who read him; but Shakespeare, or Milton, or Keats is not, to read one of them is to wish to read the others, and to discover poetry. Yet though Burns invisibly appears on Burns Nights, obedient to the summons, one feels that he too would have agreed with Mr. Eliot's opinion that the public for poetry should be "sensitive, critical and educated", for he knew something by experience which his admirers do not know—the desire for perfection and the endless pains of the artist.

WALTER SCOTT¹

I SHOULD begin by expressing the sense of mingled honour and disadvantage which I feel in being asked to follow Sir Herbert Grierson as a lecturer on Scott. The honour I need not enlarge upon in this place, the disadvantage is equally obvious for Sir Herbert is, I suppose, the chief authority on Scott now living, and I am only an admirer and periodical reader of that great novelist. Before preparing these lectures I re-read the two lectures which Sir Herbert gave a little more than four years ago. I was filled with admiration for the fine critical discrimination and the easy learning displayed in them, and the feeling they gave me that here someone was speaking who was a master of his subject. I cannot hope to emulate such a performance.

My own treatment of Scott will be much more tentative, I shall be concerned chiefly with some things in his character and work that puzzle and disconcert me. And first of all with a feeling I have often had after re-reading him. I experience the full shock of his imagination, but in a while I find it has left no lasting impression. Certain scenes and characters remain, along with a sense of abounding stir and bustle; but the full impact of a great mind, changing and illuminating one's apprehension of life, is not there. Or rather, after being present while I read, it is dissipated. In one of his lectures Sir Herbert Grierson quoted a contemporary of Scott as saying that he had not "the gift of suggesting, as some poets can, by a

¹ The Walter Scott lecture for 1944, given at the University of Edinburgh

few details far more than meets the eye, because they communicate an emotional impression which of itself helps to evoke the completer picture" The critic was speaking of Scott's poetry, but his observation applies also to the world of the Waverley Novels. They do not bring that quickening to the mind which sets the mind going by itself, as the work of lesser novelists such as Sterne and Thackeray and Jane Austen does. They do not go on working within us long after we have read them.

What reason can be found for this peculiarity of Scott's imagination? The most obvious one is a certain lack of intimacy. By universal testimony Scott was a frank and open-hearted man; but frankness has nothing to do with intimacy in this sense. Wordsworth was not frank, nor was Emily Bronte; yet both are intimate writers in a sense that Scott was not. For intimacy does not consist in a writer's telling us all about himself, but rather in communicating entire, with scrupulous fidelity, what his imagination reveals to him about life, whether it is pleasing or displeasing. Scott chose to keep something back, he lacked the overpowering compulsion. A writer who gives his imaginative vision entire must have a devotion to his work, the deliberate devotion of Wordsworth, or the instinctive devotion of Emily Bronte, and he must prize certain invisible things above the practical things of life. It is hard to judge whether Scott did this. He certainly was not devoted to his art as Wordsworth and Keats were, or even as Dickens and Thackeray were. The difficulty is to know to what he was chiefly devoted.

It has been said of Scott that he was too busy living to have much time or energy for writing. This is one of those absurd apologies which do him more harm than good. Yet we know that in his prime he liked to be ten hours a day outdoors, shooting, fishing or riding.

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John Buchan in his biography also insists that "we shall not understand Scott unless we realise how much he lived in a secret world of his own, an inner world of dream and memory, from which he brought great treasures" And a little later Buchan mentions quite a different side of him in saying that he "liked the idea of marriage as a step in that progress in life to which one side of him was vowed" The progress in life again, the getting-on, had to find some palpable symbol, that symbol was Abbotsford, a house which was equally suited to a great Border laird and a great Gothic novelist. Abbotsford in turn had to be kept up, and now and then enlarged; this involved the making of money on a great scale, and money could be made on a great scale only by writing rapidly one story after another. Finally even that was not sufficient, Scott needed money in still greater plenty, and without the necessary training or aptitude involved himself in a maze of business transactions. In this chaos of activities, his hunting and riding, his responsibilities as a country gentleman and a Border laird, his money-making, his writing, his social engagements in Edinburgh, his secret life of dream and memory, where did his main devotion lie? The question becomes still harder to answer when we reflect that two of the lives he led, his writing life, and his business life, he kept secret for many years. He was frank and open-hearted, but a frank and open-hearted man who keeps two of his lives secret, and cherishes in addition a secret world of his own of which even his published work shows few traces; a man of acknowledged good sense who squanders his health and finally his life to realise a fantastic dream—is a very difficult man to understand. Such riddles do not await our solution, but at most our respectful consideration; there can be no "explanation" of Scott or of anyone else; if an explanation were forth-

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coming we should not know what to do with it; we should have to turn from it again to Scott himself

But to establish within the circumference of the riddle some connections between Scott's character and his work should be possible. One of them is obvious enough. To writers of Scott's creative genius the practical activities in which they engage, however apparently irrelevant, are generally transformed into subject-matter for their imagination, even their errors and misfortunes are somehow turned to account. The same impulse which drove Scott to build Abbotsford enabled him to understand the man of ambition and the palpable form and bounds of a dream of earthly glory. Without his active hours in the open air he could not have described so convincingly men's enjoyment in exercising their physical powers. Even his business speculations must have helped him to realise by what curiously mixed ways the ambitious man achieves that respect and power which, seen from outside, appear to be quite without alloy.

In the discussion of *Hamlet* in Joyce's *Ulysses* the author makes John Eglinton say of Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway and his desertion of her afterwards, "The world believes that Shakespeare made a mistake and got out of it as quickly and as best he could"; to which Stephen Dedalus replies, "Bosh! A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery." This is the pure artist's point of view affirmed with fanatical conviction by a man who was resolved to put all his own mistakes into his work, and all the knowledge, pleasant and unpleasant, which they brought him. Scott's conception of his art was very different from Joyce's, and his estimation of his genius less arrogant; he accepted it and the delight it gave him, one imagines, very much as he accepted his delightful hours in the

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open air. Abbotsford no doubt became in time a portal of discovery; but it is certain that he did not regard it as such. And his mistakes, no matter how much he may have learned from them as a man and a novelist, remained mistakes in his eyes, whether volitional or not.

But whatever else went into his work, there was one episode in his life which never did so, or at best in the most shadowy and ghostlike way—his unsuccessful love affair as a young man with Williamina Stuart-Belsches, whose marriage to another suitor threw him into such despair that his friends were concerned for his life. We have evidence enough that his rejection by Williamina caused him lasting grief. While he was courting her he had cut her name on the turf beside the castle gate at St Andrews. Thirty-four years later, sitting on an adjacent gravestone, he wondered why the name should still agitate his heart. A few months afterwards he met Lady Jane, Williamina's mother, in Edinburgh, Williamina had then been dead for seventeen years.

I fairly softened myself like an old fool [he wrote], with recalling stories, till I was fit for nothing but shedding tears and repeating verses for the whole night. This is sad work. The very grave gives up its dead, and time rolls back thirty years to add to my perplexities.

After her marriage he had resolutely banished Williamina from his thoughts; but in spite of him she invaded his secret world, for it is said that on the eve of any great misfortune she appeared to him in his dreams.

In the summer after Williamina's marriage Scott's heart was "handsomely pierced", as he put it, by a young lady whom he met during a visit to the English Lakes. Miss Charlotte Margaret Carpenter became

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his wife. Twelve years later he wrote to Lady Abercorn:

Mrs Scott's match and mine was of our own making, and proceeded from the most sincere affection on both sides, which has rather increased than diminished during twelve years' marriage. But it was something short of love in all its forms, which I suspect people only feel once in all their lives, folk who have been nearly drowned in bathing rarely venturing a second time out of their depth.

Unlike Williamina, Mrs Scott never entered his secret world.

This episode which Scott put so resolutely behind him but which refused to be banished altogether, filling him with agitation thirty years later when the object of his love was dead, making him prefer affection to love as a basis of marriage, was clearly one of the decisive experiences of his life. It is useless to speculate now what would have happened if Williamina had returned his love instead of rejecting it, yet one can hardly resist it. If he had married Williamina, would Abbotsford have become so important to him, would his ambition have fixed itself on such a limited and yet ostentatious object, would his ten hours a day in the open air have been so dear to him? And might not the development of his genius have been different, might not his imagination have acquired a greater intimacy from his experience of the most intimate of all human relations? In any case, the effect of her rejection of him was to make him turn away from one potentiality of experience for good. Yet as he was on one side a lover of adventure, like his heroes, the desire to venture out of his depth could not be eradicated so easily; he could not rid himself of it by marrying for affection instead of love. He had to venture out of his depth, and he did so in financial speculation. It was in business that he indulged his need for adventure.

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A natural reticence in Scott, confirmed by the literary and moral conventions of his time, prevented him from re-creating in imagination the story of his early love. Or perhaps the memory was so painful that he could not bear to recall it. John Buchan praises him for this abstention, but it seems to be a matter neither for praise nor for blame, we do not blame Shakespeare for his sonnets. Scott was not devoted to the art of writing with the fanaticism of a modern novelist like Joyce, nor prepared to offer up to it his buried secrets. Nevertheless it is possible that Joyce's generalisation has a certain point if we apply it to Scott's resolve to put the memory of Williamina behind him, for that was probably the main reason for his inability to portray love, and for the great number of insipid female figures in his novels. His old women, his peasant women, his queens and princesses, his gipsies and vagabonds, all of them by virtue of age or class unlikely to prove dangerous to any of the young heroes in whom we see an image of Scott himself at the stage when he was in love with Williamina, are drawn with a sure hand. The others, the potentially dangerous ones, seem to fall in love because in a romance they are expected to do so, and their love stories would quickly weary us, and Scott too, if they were not enlivened with all sorts of intrigues and dangers.

It seems plausible to think, then, that the disastrous outcome of Scott's affair with Williamina and the resolution with which he put her memory behind him contracted the scope of his imagination and made it impossible for him to describe love. It may have been, too, the cause of his general lack of intimacy. For some reason he could not say the most intimate thing of all, the thing which might have given him the gift "of suggesting by a few details far more than meets the eye, because they communicate an emotional impression which of itself

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helps to evoke the completer picture” The emotional impression is lacking. He would always have been one of the great objective writers. But if the course of his life had been different, he might have conveyed in his picture of life a more profound sense of significance. The bustle, the energy, the humour and pathos of life are there as they are nowhere else, even in Balzac and Tolstoy, but there is no serious criticism of life. When Scott expresses a judgment of experience it comes from the secret world where the memory of Williamina was buried, and its burden is that all is vanity, the bustle, the adventure, the glory, everything that he created with such genial warmth and abundance

Look not thou on beauty's charming,
Sit thou still when kings are arming
Stop thine ear against the singer,
From the red gold keep thy finger—
Vacant heart, and hand, and eye,
Easy live and quiet die

If we are conscious of an emptiness beneath the bustle and action of his novels, and beneath the surface of his busy life, the reason may lie here

The affair with Williamina may possibly throw some light on another trait of Scott—his grossly practical attitude to his writings, which is like that of a man who turns from a high satisfaction to make sure of a lower one. In the introductory epistle to *The Fortunes of Nigel* he speaks very frankly.

No one shall find me rowing against the stream. I care not who knows it—I write for general amusement . . . A man should strike when the iron is hot, and hoist sail while the wind is fair. If a successful author keeps not the stage, another instantly takes his ground

If we accept this statement, we shall be forced to think that Scott had no aim but success. Yet “I care not

who knows it" implies at least that he was not proud of what he was saying. And he softens the effect of his declaration later by a more plausible explanation of his hurried and careless method of composition.

I should be chin-deep in the grave, man, before I had done with my task, and in the meanwhile, all the quirks and quiddities which I might have devised for my readers' amusement would lie rotting in my gizzard.

The creations of his imagination crowded in upon him so thick and fast that he had to deal with them as best he could.

Yet there was a genuine reason for his determination to keep the stage and not resign it to the next comer, for he was always in need of money, since he was driven by another impulse just as powerful as his imagination, the ambition whose symbol was *Abbotsford*. Ambition on a large scale generally involves the taking of risks. He himself was adventurous on one side and prudent on another, as befitted the son of an impulsive and imaginative mother and a respectable and practical father. In his life these two sides of him seem to have played a complicated game of hide-and-seek with each other. As a writer he lived in a secret world of romance and adventure, while to his acquaintances he existed as a respectable gentleman of means. The curious thing is that it was the romancer and adventurer who produced the means, and the respectable gentleman who squandered them. One does not know whether to regard *Abbotsford* as the dream of the romancer, or the final justification of the man of position. There is a stage in Scott's life after which it is almost impossible to disentangle his business and social from his literary activities, for they fall into the position of cause and effect, the income from his novels paying his debts, and the dream of *Abbotsford* forcing him to get still more

deeply into debt. The romantic world he created in his books became a sort of bank from which he drew the credit to realise the ideal of a splendid traditional Border community with himself at its head. If he had succeeded in realising that ideal it would probably have satisfied both sides of him, the romantic and the social.

In this confusion of activities which makes up Scott's life as a man, where each activity seems to be performing a function better suited to the others, where writing is regarded as a means of making money and business turns out to be a means of losing it, we are brought up once more against his regardless attitude to his genius. His genius and his ambition pulled him in opposite directions. His ambition was not to be known as a great writer, but to achieve a distinguished position in society and to live a life of traditional grandeur in the Border country and of social influence in Edinburgh. Wordsworth did not know that division, nor on a different level did Dickens, their genius and their ambition were set in the same direction, they put all of themselves into their work, they had no Abbotsford.

There remains Scott's secret world into which Williamina found her way, and no one else so far as we know. When he draws upon it its message is unmistakable and tells us that all action is vain, as in Lucy's song in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, or predetermined by necessity, as in Redgauntlet's outburst on liberty of choice. It is concerned with death and the grave, as in *Proud Maisie* and the conversation between the old women in the churchyard when the Master of Ravenswood rides away. These are the voices of his secret world. Is it fanciful to imagine that they bring us back again to Williamina Stuart-Belsches, who still existed in his secret world although she was dead, and was twice dead to him through her first rejection of him? Among the novels, there is most of his secret world in *The Bride*

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of *Lammermoor*, which he wrote in a delirium of pain, so that he could not remember a single scene when it was shown to him, and found the whole "monstrous, gross and grotesque" In some of his later novels there is evidence that he had accepted consciously its pessimistic reading of life, his physical powers and his vast capacity for enjoyment having by then declined There is the passage towards the end of *Woodstock*

Years rush by us like the wind We see not whence the eddy comes, nor whitherward it is tending, and we seem ourselves to witness their flight without a sense that we are changed, and yet Time is beguiling man of his strength as the wind robs the woods of their foliage

There is *Redgauntlet's* outburst on free-will.

The privilege of free action belongs to no mortal—we are tied down by the fetters of duty—our mortal path is limited by the regulations of honour—our most indifferent actions are meshes of the web of destiny by which we are all surrounded

Yes, young man, in doing and suffering we play but the part allotted to us by Destiny, the manager of this strange drama—stand bound to act no more than is prescribed, to say no more than is set down for us, and yet we mouth about free-will, and freedom of thought and action, as if Richard must not die, or Richmond conquer, exactly where the Author has decreed it shall be so

This is the comment of Scott's secret world on the world of bustling action. What gives *Redgauntlet* a unique place among the Waverley Novels is that it shows us a man of action aware of the vanity of action, who continues the fight in spite of that knowledge, "tied down by the fetters of duty", "limited by the regulations of honour" Compared with him Scott's other heroes live in a world of illusion Their world is more rich and various and coloured and in a sense

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more full of interest than Redgauntlet's predetermined world. It is the world which Scott most enjoyed describing, but to one who knew Redgauntlet's world and who wrote, "life could not be endured were it seen in its reality", it must sometimes have appeared to be a world suspended over nothingness.

II

The imperfections of a great writer are like the flaws in a precious stone; they should be regarded as qualities rather than faults. In Scott's case we have to take into account an attribute of the precious stone distinct from its quality or its rarity—its size. His mere bulk adds something spectacular and stupendous to him which his contemporaries felt and we can still feel. Where all is so huge, the faults are huge too; they are so obvious that certain critics have never been able to see beyond them. Mr. E. M. Forster, a man of genius and intelligence, has said that Scott is not even a good story-teller, and has demonstrated it by an amusing account of the plot of *The Antiquary*.

Scott was a very great story-teller, as well as a very bad one. *The Antiquary* certainly contains one of his worst plots. But his particular kind of story-telling did not depend on plot, and was often good in spite of it, the story being excellent even where the plot was mediocre or bad. A coherent plot obviously adds greatly to the total effect of a story, since in it all the incidents contribute to that effect. Such a story stays in the memory, not as a collection of episodes, but as a whole, and the cumulative movement of the action produces that emotional impression, the absence of which

from Scott's poetry has been mentioned. This concentrated effect, which is like the effect of a whole mind directed on a single object, we find seldom in Scott's novels, and perhaps only in two—*The Heart of Midlothian*, his greatest story, and *The Bride of Lammermoor*, the story in which we have the strongest impression of fate.

But the coherent necessitated plot is not his typical plot. His art as a story-teller could not have expanded to its full freedom within it, for with its emphasis on unity it did not give scope for the enormous degree of variety which he claimed. His stories in general have a direction, they set out from one point to reach another; but they take a rambling course, and there is nothing which they may not gather in before they reach their end. All the events in a story like *The Bride of Lammermoor* carry the mind forward to the conclusion. But in most of the Waverley Novels our minds are immediately fascinated by the succession of changing scenes which the journey produces, and the end is disappointing, being merely a conventional end. These stories consist mostly of middle; their abundance is all packed between the two conventions without which a story cannot exist, since it must start somehow and end somehow. The freedom which Scott demands from his plot, once he has started from somewhere to reach somewhere, is really a freedom to explore the whole human scene; and the laboured complication of the action is only a means to evoke a sense of the natural complication of human life. He is never tired of involving his plots, but he does so because he is endlessly interested in character and situation. And how brilliantly he manages it, his skill puts him among the greatest story-tellers.

The Fortunes of Nigel contains one of his most complicated plots. By any standard it is far too involved;

the sequence of accidents to the papers securing young Lord Glenvarlich's possession of his estates becomes monstrous, absurd, almost wearisome. But what a variety of characters and scenes are gathered into the story by this stratagem, and what a liveliness is communicated to them by the vigour of the action. We must accept the complication of these plots as an artificial but necessary convention, as we accept the convention of romantic opera.

In *The Fortunes of Nigel* Scott states a whole series of themes; the historical novelty of life in seventeenth-century London, the hostility between the English and the Scots whom the King had drawn south along with him, the connection with the mob through Vincent the apprentice, the connection with the Court through George Heriot. All this is stated in the first few chapters, and in the succeeding ones the fabric grows until it takes in the whole life of London. If Balzac had concentrated his powers to fill such a canvas, he would have done it in sections, devoting a separate book to each. Scott gathers the endless variety into one colossal whole. He does this without falling into confusion. The characters are thrown together pell-mell in the action, the classes intermingle in all sorts of ways; yet each figure remains as firmly in his station as the characters in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. Only a writer with Scott's fine sense of proportion could have been both so involved and so orderly. But the involution was necessary; it was the only means by which a novelist of action could have given an impression of the complication of human life.

The Fortunes of Nigel is Scott's most baroque work. *Old Mortality* is comparatively simple because there he had a historical subject, the religious struggle in Scotland in the second half of the seventeenth century: the murder of Archbishop Sharpe and the battles of Drum-

clog and Bothwell Brig play an essential part in it. The action had to be woven round these important happenings. The invention is not free, therefore, as in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, being used to show in what ways the creed of the extreme Covenanters affected their character and speech, and above all to state dramatically the case of the two sides to the dispute. Members of the opposing parties get entangled in personal relations with one another, as in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, their humanity prevailing over their opinions and loyalties. This happens in all the novels. Scott keeps two things evenly balanced: his sense of universal humanity, and his awareness of the conventions of society. The first enables him to let people of all classes intermingle, the second, to keep them intact in their places. No other novelist does this so surely. We may object to the philosophy of life implied by this performance, which is that of a traditional Tory, we may object to its being done at all, but we cannot but admire the perfection with which it is done. One might almost say that Scott puts man in his place, or rather in what was once his place. And he does it so perfectly because he does it absent-mindedly.

In *Old Mortality* Scott needed all his objectivity, for he was dealing with an issue which was alive in his time and is not yet dead. Mr. Forster complains that Scott lacks both imaginative passion and artistic detachment. Actually Scott's detachment is sometimes disconcerting, is pushed to an extreme where we feel that nothing matters. It comes too easily, we feel he has no right to it. But in *Old Mortality* he had to make a hard effort to achieve detachment and state the case for both sides fairly, and this gives a tension to the action which is absent from most of the other novels.

But Scott's story-telling was, of course, mainly a device for delineating character. His most obvious

virtue as a painter of character is the complexity of impression he achieves by apparently simple means. We tend to think of his characters as simple characters; yet if we examine them we discover that hardly one is simple. Compared with those of Dickens or Fielding or Thackeray, they have infinite light and shade, though the light is so exactly where it should be, and the shadow falls so naturally, that we scarcely notice it. Yet they are all complex and surprising: Bailie Nicol Jarvie with his mixture of business sharpness and love of adventure; Andrew Fairservice with his cunning, conceit, self-righteousness and rustic poetry, and above all, James the Sixth of Scotland and First of England. Scott never tells us what James is thinking; he reveals him entirely through what he does and says. Yet he gives as completely as anyone could an impression of the bottomless complexity of that curious man, and leaves him a rounded character, a human being who successfully reconciles within himself outrageous irreconcilables. We cannot observe how it is done, the use of light and shade is so fine, yet the figure so definite. Thackeray lavished all his skill on Becky Sharp, but she seems laboured and crude compared even with Scott's minor characters.

His supreme means for the revelation of character is of course dialogue; one feels sometimes that the action is contrived simply to give the characters an opportunity to speak out. And they put all of themselves into what they say, their dispositions, their moods, their memories, their philosophies. Scott knew that his main strength lay here, as he shows in an ironical imaginary dialogue between Dick Tinto, a painter, and himself at the beginning of *The Bride of Lammermoor*. "Your characters", Dick tells him, "make too much use of the *gob box*; they *patter* too much; there is nothing in whole pages but mere chat and dialogue." The

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author replies: "The ancient philosopher was wont to say, 'speak, that I may know thee', and how is it possible for an author to introduce his *personae dramatis* to his readers in a more interesting and effectual manner than by the dialogue in which each is represented as supporting his own appropriate character?"

Scott's persons support their appropriate characters with unexampled eloquence, yet with the most exact proportion. Mr Forster once remarked that the whole of Mrs Micawber could be summed up in the sentence: "I shall never desert Mr Micawber." Scott's characters cannot be contained in such formulas. They are not made up of one or two set qualities like the characters of Dickens; we feel that they are moulded from the substance of which human life is made, and contain all or almost all its attributes, the only difference between one character and another being that these attributes are compounded in different proportions. So that beyond the individual compounding there is something universally human which may burst out in some emergency, as in Jeanie Deans' appeal to the Queen.

In their light and shade and something unexpected in them, Scott's characters are unlike those of any other Scottish or English writer except some of Sterne's, for Sterne too was fascinated by the complexity of human nature. They are more like the characters of a novelist who in every other way was as unlike Scott as possible—Dostoevsky, particularly in the superb comic vein which he displays in the first part of *The Possessed*. Scott's characters have greater wholeness and harmony, and Dostoevsky's greater depth; but there is in both the same ability to be alive in a surprising way, as long as they are on the stage. Scott's grasp of the complexity of character came from his perception of human wholeness, and Dostoevsky's from his knowledge of

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man's inward division. But in their management of light and shade and a certain concealed or implied wit, they strikingly resemble each other.

Scott and Dostoevsky resemble each other in another way too, in their power to make their characters now and then say things of more than individual significance and turn them into voices which seem to speak for whole classes of humanity to all humanity. The best way to give an idea of these utterances is to quote some of them:

"I have had mony a thought, that whan I faund mysell auld and forfain, and no able to enjoy God's blessed air ony langer, I wad drag mysell here wi' a pickle aitmeal—and see, there's a bit bonny drapping well that popples that selfsame gate simmer and winter—and I wad e'en streck mysell out here, and abide my removal, like an auld dog that trails his useless ugsome carcase into some bush or bracken, no to gie living things a scunner wi' the sight o't when it's dead—Ay, and then, when the dogs barked at the lone farmstead, the gudewife wad cry, 'Whisht, stirra, that'll be auld Edie,' and the bits o' weans wad up, puir things, and toddle to the door, to pu' in the auld Blue Gown that mends a' their bonny-dies—but there wad be nae word mair o' Edie, I trow "

"I have been flitting every term these four and twenty years, but when the time comes there's aye something to saw that I would like to see sawn—or something to maw that I would like to see mawn—or something to ripe that I would like to see ripen—and sae I e'en daiker on wi' the family frae year's end to year's end But if your honour wad wush me ony place where I wad hear pure doctrine, and hae a free cow's grass, and a cot, and a yard, and mair than ten punds of annual fee, and where there was nae leddy about the town to count the apples, I'se hold mysell muckle indebted to ye "

"It's weel wi' you gentles, that can sit in the house wi' handkerchers to your een when ye lose a friend, but the likes

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o' us maun to our waik again if our hearts were beating as hard as my hammer. There's a curse either on me or on this auld black bitch of a boat that I have hauled high and dry and patched and clouted sae mony yeais, that she might drown my poor Steenie at the end of them, and be d—d to her! Yet what needs ane be angry at her, that has neither soul nor sense? though I am no that muckle better mysell. She's but a rickle o' auld rotten deals, warped wi' the wind and the sea—and I am a dour carle, battered by foul weather at sea and land till I am maist as senseless as hersell. She maun be mended though again' the morning tide—that's a thing o' necessity."

"Do you see that blackit and broken end of a shealing?—There my kettle boiled for forty years—there I boie twelve burdly sons and daughters—Where are they now?—Where are the leaves that were on that auld ash-tree at Martinmas! the west wind has made it bare—and I'm stripped too—Do you see that saugh-tree?—it's but a blackened rotten stump now—I've sat under it mony a bonny summer afternoon, when it hung its gay garlands ower the poppling water—I've sat there and I've held you on my knee, Henry Bertram, and sung ye sangs of the auld barons and their bloody wars—It will ne'er be green again, and Meg Merrilies will never sing sangs mair, be they blithe or sad. But ye'll no forget her?—and ye'll gar big up the auld wa's for her sake? and let somebody live there that's ower gude to fear them of another world—For if ever the dead come back among the living, I'll be seen in this glen mony a night after these crazed banes are in the mould."

In passages like these Scott speaks simultaneously from his daylight and his secret world.

FRIEDRICH HOLDERLIN

HOLDERLIN is a difficult poet to understand, not because his language is particularly obscure, but because the world of his imagination is arranged in such an unusual way. From the first his mind was possessed by the classical world, and Greece in particular, with its gods and its elements, fire, water, air, the ether. He lived in that world more exclusively than any other modern poet has done. Then came his mental breakdown: grief for the loss of Susette Gontard shattered his mind, smashing his classical world to pieces, but the pieces survived, though the connecting structure was damaged; and in the later poems we find these fragments appearing in a new order.

To look for ordinary logic in that order would be useless. Yet it is more significant than the first, normal, order, for it is immediately related to an intense personal experience. *Der Archipelagus* is a magnificent reconstruction of ancient Greece; but it is cold compared with a poem like *Patmos*, in which Hercules, John the Baptist, the disciples, Christ, Henry IV at Canossa seem to come as close to Holderlin, though in fits and starts, as the contortions of his own grief. Experience transformed his classical world from an imaginative picture into a kind of mythology.

His poetry had always been symbolical in a definite sense; when he wrote a poem on the oak, for instance, he did not mean any oak that could be seen by the eye, but an idea. The palpable world was impalpable to him, and ideas palpable: one has only to turn to the titles of some of his poems: "Der Mensch", "Des

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Morgens", "Die Gotter", Der Frieden", "An die Hoffnung", "An den Fruhling", "Die Liebe", and compare the conventional themes with his treatment of them. But in the poems which he wrote after his breakdown this symbolism became more significant, for it expressed his immediate experience and therefore speaks, though in a curious language, to ours.

This language is curious in two ways it is highly personal, and it is disconnected with the significant disconnectedness of dreams. To take the first quality: when Holderlin speaks of Bacchus, Hercules, the gods in general, the elements, love, poetry, home, country, man, he means something personal and at the same time constant and unchanging. Rilke in the *Duinese Elegies* attaches a private meaning to the Angels, and Yeats, if we are to accept *A Vision* as a handbook to his poems, attaches a private meaning to everything. But these private meanings of Rilke and Yeats have nothing in common with Holderlin's meanings, which seem to arise as a direct response to a vision. Rilke tried to explain the meaning of his Angels, and Yeats has explained the whole system of thought which provided his poetry with metaphors. But the specific meanings which Holderlin attributes to certain entities seems to be inherent in his mere grammatical use of them, to be implied in the manner in which, as words, they come into a sentence. These particular terms are like fragments of a different kind of speech, simple, inexplicable, constant, incapable of being replaced by any rational explanation of them. Hercules is always Hercules, stationary, timeless, and it is the same with the other entities to which Holderlin ascribes this peculiar significance. As these entities are constant elements in his later poetry, they give it, as well as this baffling depth, a certain radiant monotony. Most of his later poems are very like one another.

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The disconnectedness of his poetry is related to his peculiar use of words as well as to his madness, or rather they go together. In the words representing Bacchus, Hercules, the gods, the home as a static pattern, we have an explanation of the abrupt transitions which fill his poetry, the recurring effect of passing at one step from the world of time and change to that of timelessness, and back again. The contrast between change and changelessness impressed him early, and found its perfect expression in *Schickalslied*, where the gods are described as wandering in light, fateless, their eyes gazing in still, eternal clarity, and men as stumbling and falling every moment like water flung from cliff to cliff.

After Holderlin's madness these two worlds became confused in his mind, and his language took on simultaneously a new fullness and obscurity. The fullness cannot be separated from the obscurity, or rather it is one of its causes. For the obscurity springs mainly from the fact that certain words seem to carry more meaning than they can hold; their meaning is too big for them, and produces a sense of something vast but confused. Analysis or rationalisation of them can therefore do very little with them. It is the same with certain statements in his poems, quite simple in appearance, for example, where he says in *Patmos* in the middle of the description of Asia rising with its thousand fragrant peaks,

And blinded I sought
Something I knew,

which in the original is so densely charged with mystery. There are other statements which become strange because "and" is used where one would expect "but"; it is as if Holderlin's imagination were so full

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that he had to use the uniting conjunction instead of the qualifying one.

Near is the god
And hard to grasp

The unique rearrangement of his shattered world is partly responsible, doubtless, for such conjunctions, since the gods and the elements live there on the same plane as mankind, and there is no hard and fast barrier between time and eternity; so that what would appear a qualification or a contradiction in an ordinary statement is in Holderlin's world the self-evident continuation of a simple assertion. That is, if we can call what Holderlin created a world. It is rather a radiant chaos, containing fragments of a world which has been some time or will be some time, where there are more freely co-existing elements than can be compressed into the ordinary world, or have yet been compressed into it; and these by their mere presence suggest a whole which, as there is nowhere else to put it, evokes the thought of some distant future. Holderlin is particularly equivocal in his treatment of time; it is sometimes hard to tell whether he is writing about the past or the future, or an unchanging present. And because this brings the present and the past together, evoking a possibility of a new mode of perception, it suggests the future.

To speculate upon what Holderlin's poetry owed to his mental instability is useless, for as soon as we set down one of the qualities of his poetry to derangement, we discover that it can be interpreted as something else. His confusion of past and present, the gods and men, the timeless and the transitory, is perhaps an effect of mental disturbance; but it has another aspect in which that confusion seems to come from a more than usually concrete grasp of certain truths: that the past exists in

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the present, that the gods (or what Holderlin meant by them) mingle with human history, that time and timelessness are inextricably bound up. All this can be read into his poetry, not as ideas clothed in images, but as a direct and simple recognition. Ideas were concrete presences to him, and that is one of the main causes of the strangeness of his poetry: reduce these presences back to ideas again—they can never be completely reduced—and there is nothing mad, nothing even extraordinary about them.

The derangement of Holderlin's mind can be more clearly seen in the extreme disconnectedness of some of his poetry, where a gap seems to yawn between one statement and the next, producing an effect as if the reader closed his eyes for a moment and found himself in a different place when he opened them again. Yet even this can produce superb results, as in the passage in *Patmos* which follows Holderlin's announcement that he intends to sing of Christ as he had sung of Hercules.

Immeasurable

The fable since Him And now
I would sing the journey of the nobles
To Jerusalem, and anguish wandering in Canossa,
And Henry Except courage itself
Fail me That must
Be taken into account For like morning mist are
 the names
Since Christ Become dreams Fall like error
 On the heart, and deadly if no one
 Ponder what they are and understand

The real demoralisation of Holderlin's mind can be seen rather in some of his very last poems, which are free from any touch of strangeness, completely personal, and move us not as poetry, but as an intimate expression

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of his long-continued suffering:

Das Angenehme dieser Welt hab ich genossen
Der Jugend Freuden sind wie lang! wie lang!
verflossen
April und Mai und Junius sind feine
Ich bin nichts mehr, ich lebe nicht mehr gerne

"I have enjoyed the pleasant things of this world. The joys of youth have faded long, long ago April and May and June are far away I am nothing now, I no longer wish to live." That is moving when we know who wrote it; but as poetry, except for the beautiful third line, it has little more than a specialised interest. We feel that when Holderlin wrote these lines the world in which his imagination had lived was not only in ruins but vanished without a trace, leaving merely the carpenter's house in Tübingen and his daily round.

The imagination in Holderlin's poetry is obviously related to dreams. It is not the kind of imagination which deals with ordinary experience—for instance, the life around it—but has its subject-matter given to it in a quite different way, somewhat as the subject-matter of a dream is given in sleep. It has therefore very little specifically to do with the contemporary world, like a good deal of romantic poetry and almost all mystical poetry. Or at most it regards the contemporary world as the Old Testament prophets regarded it: that is, in general terms, as falling short of its vision. This imagination is unlike any other kind; for while it works with greater freedom than ordinary imagination, one can hardly say on what it works: the ancestral racial dream material of which Jung speaks, or the delusive desires of mankind in all ages. It is related to prophecy (Isaiah) on the one hand, and to dream literature (De Quincey) on the other. The real as-

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sumption of this kind of poetry is that human existence can be changed, or rather will be changed, just as the assumption of dramatic poetry is that human existence is unchangeable. There seems to be no compromise between these two views.

HOLDERLIN'S *PATMOS*

THERE are three separate versions of *Patmos*, the first two complete, the third fragmentary. The second very closely follows the first and is an improved version of it. The third, which is considerably more obscure, contains several alterations and additions. The subject of the poem is not St John, as the title might indicate, but Christ; and it marks a turning point in Holderlin's imaginative interpretation of history and time, for which in his earlier poetry Greece and the gods of Greece had stood as the supreme symbols. He seems to have begun the poem with the intention of including Christ in this personal hierarchy. The attempt failed, as he confesses in the course of the third version.

John Christ These I would sing
As I have sung Hercules

But that
Cannot be A destiny is different More marvellous
To sing, richer

That is his indirect and almost bemused confession that Christ could not be included among the other gods. The problem had touched him in an earlier poem, *Der Einzige*. "I have seen many beautiful things," he says, "and I have sung God's image that lives among men. . . . But when I enquired among the ancients, the heroes and the gods, why did You stay away?" Trying to pick up his former style he goes on to compare Christ with Bacchus, but then says: "Yet a feeling of shame hinders me from likening You with men of this

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world", by which, in spite of the strangeness of the designation, Bacchus was obviously meant. He continues: "And I know that he who bore You, your Father, the same who—". Then comes a blank line, followed by: "For never does He rule alone". The poem shows throughout an intense vacillation of mind, which culminates in that missing line. It is an involuntary confession, retracted and given again, for he goes on. "But on One hangs my love. This time the song has come too straight from my heart, yet I will make good the error in my next one, if I ever sing another. Never can I strike the balance as I would wish." The balance in general; perhaps also the balance between the gods and Christ. This problem was clearly one which troubled Holderlin during those years, and in *Patmos* it finds its most complete resolution.

Before considering *Patmos* itself it might be best to say something of the poetry of Holderlin's later period of which it is the crown. That poetry draws part of its inspiration from history, and shows, though in a rudimentary form, an understanding of what we call the historical sense. Holderlin as a young man was a friend of Hegel and Schelling; they read Plato, Kant and Jacobi together, and he was influenced by their ideas. But in the essence of his genius and in his attitude to what he regarded as the chief problem of existence—the ways by which God makes Himself known to man—he was nearer to Wordsworth than to any other writer. Like Wordsworth, he was concerned with Man, not with the men of his own or any particular civilisation or age. But while Wordsworth found God in nature, Holderlin found Him in history, in time. To divine the workings of God in history is what we call prophecy. The prophet in the narrower sense foresees these workings in the future: Holderlin saw them in the past as well, in the universal story of man-

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kind. It is this perception that gives the prophetic part of his poetry its unique intonation, as of a single voice speaking to the gods in a solitude. His utterance is like that of a man accounting to himself for things which he cannot tell to others. The impression of vastness produced by his poetry is due to the fact that the past with all its powers—gods, heroes, emanations—was as real to him as the present. The past was not something that could be thrown into contrast, or paralleled, with the present, as in the poetry of Mr. Eliot and Mr. Pound. It widened the present in a striking and incalculable way, and this expansion gives us a sense of a vast whole, a universal dispensation which is the life of mankind from beginning to end. As all prophecy looks to the fulfilment of time, this vastness is a normal element in prophetic writing, and is the source of its vagueness and grandeur. Holderlin's prophetic inspiration determined also the metre and the rhythm of his later poetry. The poetry of his first period is written in regular measure of various kinds, including rhymed verse, hexameters, alcaics and sapphics. His prophetic poetry is in a sort of free rhythm.

Patmos is a long poem; in parts its meaning is extremely obscure, the punctuation throughout is peculiar and deliberately so, and the poetic period, the sentence, is ample far beyond the usual limit of German poetry, often being carried forward, with a deliberate effect of bridging great spaces, from one strophe to the next. I have not attempted to render the whole poem, but have made excerpts long enough to give, as far as that can be done in a verse rendering, an idea of its style and its argument. Where obscurity exists I have not tried to clarify it. The poem begins:

Near is God
And hard to seize

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But where danger is, there
Rises the saviour also
In darkness dwell
The eagles, and fearless go
The sons of the mountains over the abyss
On light bridges
Therefore since round are piled
The peaks of Time, and the best beloved
Dwell near at hand, languishing
On inaccessible hills,
O give us innocent water,
Wings give us, that with steady hearts
We may go thither and return again

This is the introduction, which is in the nature of an invocation. I have done my best to give an idea of the rhythm of the verse, but there is no way of reproducing in English the peculiarly condensed style, which can be seen in the first two lines

Nah ist
Und schwer zu fassen der Gott

Nor have I been able to render the indefiniteness of such expressions as "der Gott", which may be understood in its context either as "God" or "the god", or of "das Rettende", which does not mean so much the saviour as "that which saves", or perhaps by a stretch of association the saving grace. The images in this verse are all vast and shadowy, and they are assembled in an ordered confusion which is intensified by such juxtapositions as that of the beloved dwelling near at hand and languishing on inaccessible hills. This omission of connecting links is characteristic of the poem, and of the kind of poetry to which it belongs, where mystery is not a thing to be explained, but an indefeasible presence.

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After this beginning the poem continues

So I spoke, then a genius led me
More swiftly than I could tell from my house,
And far, whither I never
Thought to come Darkened
In twilight as I went
The shadowy forest
And the longing brooks
Of home, never had I seen these lands,
But soon in first-born splendour,
Mysterious
In golden smoke,
Swiftly awakened
Under the tread of the sun
With a thousand fragrant peaks

Asia bloomed, and blinded I sought
Something I knew, for strange to me
The broad lanes where down
From Tmolus journeyed
Gold-hemmed Pactolus,
And Taurus stood and Messogis,
And full of flowers the gardens,
A still fire But in the light
Bloomed high the silvery snow,
And sign of immortal life,
On inaccessible walls
Ancient the ivy grew, and there were upborne
On living pillars, cedars and laurels,
The solemn,
The divinely-built palaces

This is a vision of the ancient world to which Holderlin turned for relief. The extraordinary length of the chief period and its continuation into the next verse convey a sense of dreamlike swiftness of movement through vast distances of time and space. The

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carrying of these great periods over from one verse to another, spanning the gap which he deliberately leaves between them, and thus lengthening still more, by the introduction of an unknown dimension, the stretch of his flying imagination, is a device peculiar to Holderlin in his time. In the original the movement of this passage is noble and mysterious.

The second version continues from here.

But round Asia's portals
In the precarious wilderness of sea
There are shadowless ways enough
Leading this way and that,
Yet the isles are known to the sailor

This is his prelude to his first mention of Patmos, but he must have felt later that it was inadequate, for he altered it in his fragmentary third version. After

And full of flowers the gardens,
which he changed to,

And almost sleepy with flowers the gardens,
he leaves a blank and continues, abruptly changing the scene from Greece to Judaea:

The airs of Jordan and Nazareth
And of Capernaum far from the sea
And of Galilee and Cana
For a little while I shall be with you, he said. With
such drops
He stilled the sighing of the light, the thirsty wilderness
Was as in the days when through all Syria
The slaughtered children wept
Still gracious in death, and the plucked head
Of the Baptist was like unfading script
Visible on the unscathed dish. Like fire
Are the voices of God

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Here the images are extraordinarily vivid but confused, seeming inextricably to mingle the past and the present, or to set them side by side in some new order. Two separate aspects of time appear to be fused in the lines

and the plucked head
Of the Baptist was like unfading script
Visible on the unscathed dish

This image is static, in spite of its violent fusion of strange elements, but beneath its surface an unknown mode of change seems to be working, so that the effect is both of rest and motion. All these meanings, not so much superimposed upon as changing into each other, are here gathered together. The poetry in this third version is quite unlike that in the first two. The effect is not of expansion but rather of an intense compression by means of which several layers of time are fused into one. The sentences are short and condensed, and the whole movement of the verse changes.

This may be seen still better in the next verse of the third version, which begins abruptly with the lines I have already quoted:

John Christ These I would sing
As I have sung Hercules

At this point Holderlin brings in the island of Patmos in a passage where both Hercules and John are allusively indicated, an extremely difficult passage which I shall not try to render. Then he continues, referring to his desire to sing of Christ as he had sung of Hercules

But that
Cannot be A destiny is different More marvellous
To sing, richer Immeasurable
The fable since Him And now
I would sing the journey of the nobles
To Jerusalem, and anguish wandering in Canossa,

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And Henry Except courage itself
Fail me That must
Be taken into account For like morning mist are
 the names
Since Christ Become dreams Fall like error
 On the heart, and deadly if no one
 Ponder what they are and understand

It is impossible in a translation to give any idea of the expressiveness of this passage, in which the images of time seem to crowd in so thickly on the poet that he can only mention them in passing, until at last he finds an image for them in something itself without number (I have translated it as "morning mist": in the original it is "Morgenluft", "morning air") To give an idea of the construction of these lines I must quote them in the original

Wie Morgenluft sind namlich die Namen
Seit Christus Werden Traume Fallen wie Irrtum
Auf das Herz und totend, wenn nicht einer
Erwaget, was sie sind und begreift

If one did not know who wrote them one would say that they were taken from the later poetry of Rilke. Rilke would have used the image of the morning air in the same way, and

Werden Traume Fallen wie Irrtum

is exactly in his style. But the pressure of imagination is more solid than Rilke's and the expression more inevitable and less ingenious. Ingenuity was Rilke's besetting sin. The psychological development of the passage is extraordinarily moving, beginning with Holderlin's wish to sing the journey to Jerusalem "und das Leiden irrend in Canossa" (obviously images of a thousand other things that crowded into his mind), which is followed by the fear that his courage might

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fail him, and at last by the vision of the names since Christ, which makes the enterprise impossible

Instead of singing the journey to Jerusalem or counting the names since Christ, he therefore turns to the figure of Christ Himself and to his second version of the poem and his more spacious style. There follows a description of the Last Supper, where Christ speaks of death and perfect love, "affirming what should be affirmed".

But His light was
Death For small is the rage of the world
This He knew All is good Thereupon He died

Nevertheless, the disciples did not want to leave Him: "therefore He sent them the Spirit, and the house shook and the thunder of God rolled far rumbling over their boding heads, foretelling that the heroes of death were assembled". This, I think, signifies another re-appearance of the ancient gods, but then Holderlin prophesies that like the setting sun Christ will return again. He goes on to ask why Christ should have died and what it can mean "if the glory of the demi-god and of his people" (another reversion to his first conception of Christ as "the brother of Hercules")

Fade, and even the Most High
Turn away His face
Above, so that nothing
Immortal is to be seen in Heaven more
Or on the green earth

In answer he uses the simile of the harvest and the thresher: "the husks fall round his feet, but in the end comes the grain".

For the divine work is as ours
Not all will the Most High at one time

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This period of darkness and sterility cannot be alleviated by false hopes or false words, for most hateful to the Lords of Heaven

Is falsehood so long as they reign, for then
Manhood is known no more among men
They do not rule, undying Fate rules,
And its work proceeds of itself
And quickly comes to an end

· But when the heavenly progress turns higher a redeeming sign is sent, "and that is the staff of song shining downwards, for nothing is common"

In this part of the poem, which I have had to summarise very briefly, there is implicit a philosophy of history. The destiny of mankind is pictured as following a cycle resembling that of the terrestrial year with its summer and winter. The world's ages of darkness are prefigured in the life of the disciples after they have lost their Master, when they "live in loving night, steadfastly preserving in simple eyes abysses of wisdom". This patient preservation of a light no longer manifest is man's task in ages of darkness, such as Holderlin considered his own to be. But in the second-last verse he rises above this conception in a fine image:

But if the heavenly ones
Love me, as I believe,
How much more Thee,
For one thing I know,
That the will of the Eternal Father
Pointed to Thee Quiet is His sign
In the thundering sky And One stands beneath
His life long For still lives Christ
But they have come, the heroes
His sons, and the holy scriptures

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From Him, and the lightning declares
The deeds of the world till now,
A combat unceasing But He is there For His works
Are known to Him from everlasting

The poem ends with a complaint that the glory of the Heavenly One should have been invisible for so long, and a declaration that the Father "who rules over all things loves chiefly that the Word should be fostered, signifying inherited good" "From this comes German song", he ends. But the core of the poem is in the image of God's quiet sign in the thundering sky and Christ standing beneath it His life long. For that image transforms from beginning to end the conception of history as a cycle of light and darkness.

In a short essay it is possible to deal with only one or two aspects of this poem, which would really require a commentary It is interesting as one of the first modern poems, in the sense that it envisages human life in historical terms Where human life is envisaged in historical terms purely the result is confusion and falsehood; and there is evidence that in his prophetic poetry, and in *Patmos* itself, this problem troubled Holderlin But while preserving his image of life as a cycle of alternating light and darkness, he saved himself from the blank relativity to which that would have committed him by the vision of the sign of God standing still in the thundering sky

Und Einer steht darunter
Sein Leben lang

His belief in Christ was clearly different from the orthodox Christian belief, and it did not force him to deny the ancient gods, who return in the very last verse of the poem Nevertheless, Christ was the one symbol which united for him the two truths which he perceived

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in existence: a truth transcending time, and a truth immanent in time: permanence and alternation. The two images in which that union is most strikingly expressed, the one in terms of time, the other in terms of eternity, are those of the head of John the Baptist and of Christ standing beneath the sign of the Father. Such mysteries are beyond the reach of a historical philosophy or of the historical sense. Much of modern poetry has been profoundly influenced by these two things. Much of Holderlin's was too, but while acknowledging the validity of history he took a step beyond history.

To grasp its nature, to show by what means and in what sense Holderlin transcended the relativity of history, one must understand his conception of poetry. It is expressed in the poem itself. When the heavenly progress turns higher, he says, a redeeming sign is sent, "and that is the staff of song shining downwards, for nothing is common." By song here he obviously does not mean poetry in general, but rather something resembling Blake's *Imagination*, which he conceives as the instrument of a process that in this world is history and in eternity is the Father's will. It was the function of poetry to seize that unity and make it known as an imaginatively coherent whole. Such glorification of poetry is sometimes regarded as a romantic delusion, along with Wordsworth's and Coleridge's conception of the imagination, with which it has much in common. But it has also much in common with Dante's and Milton's and, above all, Plato's conception of poetry. The kind of poetry which claims to reveal divine mysteries is one of the oldest known to us. In modern times *The Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost* explicitly lay claim to a revelation of this kind. That revelation, being in both cases grounded on dogma, was in a sense sanctioned. The mysteries which Holderlin claimed

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to reveal were unsanctioned, and in his poetry he treated the gods and human life in much the same way as Plato treated them in the poetic fables which he introduced into *Phædrus* and *The Banquet*. These fables were imaginative interpretations of mysteries which could not be elucidated by philosophical argument. Holderlin's prophetic poetry is of the same kind. He approached the mystery of time and eternity through the imagination. He attacked it directly, the mystery itself, not any particular manifestation of it, was his theme, and what he made out of it was a mythology.

ROBERT BROWNING

ABT VOGLER is a good example of Browning's poetic method, and also of a fault into which it sometimes led him—what is usually described as his optimism. In *Abt Vogler*, as in most of his poems, he starts with a fact of experience—in this case the evocation of music from a musical instrument—and follows it to see where it will lead him. He follows it within a simple, impressive framework which is his world of imagination; and no matter in what direction the enquiry may lead him, it is bound to reach and rest upon one of the four truths which to him were the corner-stones of that world. These four truths or affirmations, which depend upon and follow from each other, are—the uniqueness of personality, the imperfection of human life, the desire of the imperfect being for perfection, and the presence of God. These are traditional truths, and all Browning's poetry is in a sense an illustration of them, or rather a description of moments in which one or another of them is realised in ordinary experience.

Browning's enquiry into life ends at some such point; but it may begin anywhere. In general, the farther from the end it begins, the better the result is likely to be. The poems in which he states a point of view quite different from his own, as in *Cleon*, *Caliban upon Setebos*, and that very fine poem, *An Epistle*, are his best, for they call out and exercise his imagination. Where he has to state a point of view virtually his own, he acquires a false confidence, as in *Rabbi ben Ezra* and to some extent in *Abt Vogler*; the

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figure who is ostensibly monologising fades into that of the author, and, we are confronted with Browning himself and his chief fault, which is to "greet the Unseen with a cheer" and bluff himself by a display of pious geniality into mystical high spirits. When he says in this mood, " . All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist", he is not uttering a mystical truth, but expressing his own sanguine and belligerent character. He has given us his impression of that character in the Epilogue to *Asolando*.

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would
triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake

This belligerent confidence, a quality of character, was accepted by Browning's contemporaries as optimism. But the great majority of his poems, and the best of them, do not end in belligerent confidence. His character, and his personal philosophy when he stated it, were optimistic, but his world of imagination was not for the qualities which made up that world were not all comforting. The uniqueness and separation of the individual, the imperfection of human life, are not comforting. One of his finest short poems, *Two in the Campagna*, describes the desire of a lover to be completely united in soul and mind with his mistress, and his frustration:

Just when I seemed about to learn!
Where is the thread now? Off again
The old trick! Only I discern—
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn

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If we judge Browning by his best work, then it is as absurd to call him an optimist as it would be to call Dante an optimist because the *Divine Comedy* begins in Hell and ends in Heaven. What happened to him when he spoke directly of his hopes was that he forgot the more formidable elements in his imaginative world. He had to enter into the lives of people quite unlike himself before he could realise all the obstacles to his easy faith in things. But this is what he did, his work consisted in this

To understand Browning's originality one has to replace him in his age, an age when the tradition of romantic poetry was generally accepted, and poetry had become overwhelmingly contemplative, and contemplative of a set order of things, such as youth, age, life, death, love, joy, grief. These things were seen as states in an unchanging light, as simple and profound things, not as complex things containing contradictions and subject to change and development. The mood of this poetry is perfectly expressed in Tennyson's lines:

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan

The task of the poet was to contemplate such things. Browning instead set himself to enter into them and discover where they would lead him. To call his method dramatic is somewhat to misstate it. The pattern of drama is created by the action. Browning's pattern, as we have seen, was laid up in heaven: the action might receive confirmation from it, but could not create it. This pattern existed for him by an act of faith before he entered into his characters; and each of these was merely a thread by following which he

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reached some point in the pattern, and in reaching it confirmed concretely the truth of his faith in it. There is this sense of metaphysical activity behind the scenes in all his poetry. The confirmation demanded as many *independent* witnesses as possible. These had to be men and women who had tested themselves against life, and who therefore belonged to all sorts of active callings, as painters, musicians, craftsmen, priests, soldiers, revolutionaries, impostors, lovers, husbands, wives. The particular response, the demonstration of the special kind of truth which fascinated Browning, could not have been elicited from them in the actual moment of action. He did not try to write drama and fail, he tried to do something different, with complete success. He was concerned with the *dramatis personae* rather than with the play; he set himself to find out what the *dramatis personae* really thought of the play, privately. The form he invented for discovering this was the dramatic monologue which he perfected in the three volumes written in his fresh maturity. *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, *Men and Women*, and *Dramatis Personae*. He used it later, on a vast scale, in *The Ring and the Book*, and the five chief monologues in that long poem contain, perhaps, his greatest poetry.

But if Browning had not been intensely interested in men and women as well as in their place in the pattern, his work would not have its endless fascination and variety. His interest was shown in two ways. In a love for the curious, and in a love for the violently ordinary. He wrote about Paracelsus, Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha, Abt Vogler and Ben Karshook. He wrote also on such subjects as "Up at a Villa—Down in the City", "By the Fireside", "Any Wife to Any Husband", "Respectability", "How it Strikes a Contemporary", "Popularity", "Nationality in Drinks", and "Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium'". His taste for the ordinary

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shocked his contemporaries more than his taste for the odd and the remote, for it brought unexpected material into his poetry, and along with it, to deal with it, a vast new vocabulary in which the conventional poetic vocabulary of the time was swamped and drowned. The nature of his interest in mankind made this vocabulary necessary; for it was not an interest in human states, such as grief or happiness, but rather in human activity; and all human activity is technical, and demands from the poet a technical interest. Browning had this technical interest in a high degree, when he wrote of painters, or priests, or lovers, or impostors, he wrote with a professional appreciation of the importance of their modes. As love was to him the highest activity of which human beings were capable, he devoted his most intense imaginative consideration to it. He wrote, unlike the romantic poets, as a practised lover, and his subject was neither happy nor unhappy love, but love as an experience, a love both ideal and physical, whose reality was bound up with its permanence. Even his most spontaneous lyrics give an impression of experience, but his greatest love poetry is reflective, as in *Two in the Campagna* and *By the Fireside*.

Of a special kind of poetry he was incapable. He was unable to relapse into the passive and receptive states which give a quite different response to life from his own. He could not have seen with composure Tennyson's man come and till the field and lie beneath; he would have concentrated on the tilling of the field, with an agricultural passion. But what his imagination did grasp, that is the various branches of the technique of living, it grasped with a knowledge which no other modern poet has equalled.

All Browning's work is an enquiry beginning with a Perhaps and converging circuitously upon one of the cardinal truths in which he believed. The metrical

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forms which he uses sometimes fit with astonishing felicity the spirit of this enquiry, they have a tentative and casual music in which the thought seems to be experimentally finding its proper expression: almost a hand-to-mouth music. He was particularly fond of the five-line stanza which he used in *Two in the Camp* &c and *By the Fireside*, a stanza in which the last line seems to be carelessly improvised in response to an afterthought. Except when he is using a long heavy line for some dignified theme, the greatest virtue of his verse is naturalness and lightness.

How say you? Let us, O my dove,
 Let us be unashamed of soul,
 As earth lies bare to heaven above!
 How is it under our control
 To love or not to love?

This is almost a chance music, cast off in the heat of the enquiry. Of this free, faintly interrogative, street music, he was a master, and he used it with consummate ease and variety. His blank verse had a variety beyond that of any other poet of his age. A few passages from *The Ring and the Book*, where it displays all its qualities, will show what he could do with it.

And where was I found but in a strange bed
 In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise,
 Ruddy with flame, and filled with men

Launching her looks forth, letting looks reply
 As arrows to a challenge

Found myself in my horrible house once more,
 After a colloquy no word assists!
 With the mother and the brothers, stiffened me
 Strait out from head to foot as dead man does,

ROBERT BROWNING

And, thus prepared for life as he for hell,
Marched to the public square and met the world

The two, three creeping house-dog-servant-things
Born mine and bred mine

Be as the angels rather, who, apart,
Know themselves into one, are found at length
Married, but marry never

As in his arms he caught me and, you say,
Carried me in, that tragical red eve,
And laid me where I next returned to life
In the other red of morning, two red plates
That crushed together, crushed the time between,
And are since then a solid file to me

/The imagery in these passages, and Browning's imagery in general, derives its force from its psychological truth, not from its formal beauty. / It shows the depths to which Browning's imagination could pierce; it is sufficient to demonstrate that his view of life cannot be adequately defined as optimism. His variety is another matter; in that, he is second among English poets to no one but Shakespeare and Chaucer

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HARDY takes a short cut to tragedy by reducing life to a formula. He gets rid beforehand of the main obstacle to tragedy, which is man's natural inclination to avoid it. His characters are passive, or at the best endlessly patient. He does not believe that character is fate, so that for him tragedy does not proceed from action, but resides with the power which determines all action. Misfortune is not brought about by men and women, but is arranged by this power which is indifferent to all arrangements and therefore to misfortune itself. Misfortune is a principle of the universe and falls upon the weak and the strong indiscriminately, neither averted by wisdom nor brought on by folly, striking inevitably and yet as if by chance. For it is the result of a mistake which man cannot correct, since he did not make it. It was made by the Maker of the universe.

In *Wuthering Heights* the action produces the catastrophe. The outcome is inevitable because Cathy and Heathcliff are what they are. We do not have to postulate a malevolent President of the Immortals. But Clym Yeobright and Eustacia Vye and Damon Wildeve in *The Return of the Native* are not the real agents of their tragedy. Behind them, there is a power which insidiously deranges the action and defeats their intentions. Their intentions are generally good. But into the execution a disastrous change enters from outside as by a mathematical law, turning good into ill. This chance is generally a coincidence, and coincidence is therefore an organic part of Hardy's world, which

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could not exist without it. Coincidence is indispensable to him, for it is the one device by which he can evoke a sense of this power outside human life which perpetually arranges and deranges it.

The structure of Hardy's novels is designed, therefore, to give an exact value to chance and coincidence. This makes it unusually elaborate, for as the tragedy is not brought about by the action of the characters, they have to be manœuvred into some relation to one another where it will result. If Hardy had written *King Lear*, the old King would have been shorn of his train and shut out in the storm by a complicated series of misunderstandings, and his daughters would have felt bewildered by his strange conduct. A plot which accounted for all these mischances would obviously have to be elaborate. It would also alter the balance of the action, and our response to it. Compared with the implied malignancy in the texture of things, Lear's folly and his daughters' ingratitude would become secondary and unimportant. This environing fate determines the framework of the Wessex novels.

What is this power whose malice Hardy builds into the structure of his novels? Partly it is an imaginative projection of nature as the mid-Victorian geologists and biologists conceived it: something featureless and indifferent which extends through vast processes reaching back past Adam's little world, but also shows itself in the life of the present day as the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. Hardy's sensibility was almost as fine as Wordsworth's, but he had read Darwin:

There was now a distinct manifestation of morning in the air, and presently the bleared white visage of a sunless winter day emerged like a dead-born child. Owls that had been catching mice in the outhouses, rabbits that had been eating the winter-greens in the gardens, and stoats that had been

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sucking the blood of the rabbits, discerning that their human neighbours were on the move, discreetly withdrew from publicity, and were seen and heard no more till nightfall

That is very unlike nature as Wordsworth saw it, one impulse from which tells us more of human evil and good than all the sages can. It is stripped, empty, indifferent, yet the final director of man's fate.

Hardy's conception of man's relation to the indifferent earth and the indifferent universe is summarised with geometrical precision at the beginning of *The Return of the Native*. The book begins with a description of Egdon Heath, the stage on which the characters will move later on. At the highest point of the heath there is a barrow

This bossy projection of earth above its natural level occupied the loftiest ground of the loneliest height that the heath contained. Although from the vale it looked but as a wart on an Atlantean brow, its actual bulk was great. It formed the pole and axis of the heathery world.

As the resting man looked at the barrow he became aware that its summit, hitherto the highest object in the whole prospect round, was surmounted by something higher. It rose from the semi-globular mound like a spike from a helmet. It seemed a sort of last man, musing for a moment before dropping into eternal night with the rest of his race.

There the form stood, motionless as the hill beneath. Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, and above the barrow rose the figure. Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe.

Such a perfect, delicate, and necessary finish did the figure give to the dark pile of hills that it seemed to be the only obvious justification of their outline. Without it, there was the dome without the lantern, with it the architectural demands of the mass were satisfied. The scene was strangely homogeneous, in that the vale, the upland, the barrow and the figure

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above it amounted only to unity. Looking at this or that member of the group was not observing a complete thing, but a fraction of a thing

The form was so much like an organic part of the whole motionless structure that to see it move would have impressed the mind as a strange phenomenon

Yet that is what happened. The figure perceptibly gave up its fixity, shifted a step or two, and turned round. As if alarmed, it descended on the right side of the barrow, with the glide of a water-drop down a bud, and then vanished. The movement had been sufficient to show clearly the characteristics of the figure, and that it was a woman's

Here we have an exact image of mankind's position in the universe as Hardy saw it. The figure rising from the barrow is the final Euclidean touch to the landscape, and it seems at first an organic part of the entire motionless structure. Then it moves, it reveals itself as human with a volition of its own, and is suddenly "alarmed." To the earth and the surrounding universe it has a whole system of relations, some obvious, some inconceivably subtle and remote. But all these relations have one distinguishing character: that the human partner to them feels intense emotion ranging from worship to terror, and the other a sovereign indifference. The indifference is stronger than the worship and the terror. This is the ground of the tragedy, which is that of a little human family caring for love, goodness, pity and honour, but invested by a power which knows nothing of them. For his image of this power Hardy drew partly on the Greek tragic poets who had moved him so deeply as a young man, and partly on the scientific conceptions of his own time, which provided him with a universe stripped of God. Wordsworth had read in the unfettered clouds and the regions of the Heavens the workings of one mind.

, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.

In place of these Hardy saw, a featureless, blossomless, characterless, illegible presence. This is the power that man fights single-handed. He does not fight other men but the common enemy of man, who is everywhere.

In this combat Hardy is on the side of man, for man is better than the universe that defeats him. Yet to say that he is on the side of man does not put the case strongly enough, he is partial to man in a special way. By his capacity to feel and judge his feelings, to see the past and plan for the future, man should be the centre of creation, yet he is not, and the fact that he is not is an obscure anomaly, an injustice, the original injustice. If God were immanent in the universe the injustice could be rectified; divine breathings, grace, aid, comfort could come to man from every side; impulses from a vernal wood which would tell him more about human evil and good than all the sages can. But God is absent, the universe is indifferent, no help can come from it, but only accident and disaster, and the prevision which should have made man its collaborator merely makes him its more complete victim, since prevision is useless. Sometimes we have the feeling in reading Hardy that the universe is taking a private revenge on man because, alone among its creatures, he can see it as it is, reason about it, and demonstrate its cruelty. There would be no one to embarrass it in its course of evil if it were not for this unwanted bastard child who sees too much. In Hardy's universe man's presence is ultimately inexplicable; so that while he sees nature as indifferent, he

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cannot help personifying it in some diabolical form. This is a measure of the intensity of his feelings towards it, and of the contradiction of his thought. To him man's position can be explained only by a universe which perpetually defeats him, unintentionally yet intentionally. The universe, seen in this way, is simply another term for evil. Hardy lifted evil from man's shoulders and laid it on the universe. "And he told me", says Gammer Oliver in *The Woodlanders*, "that no man's hands could help what they did, any more than the hands of a clock."

This evil, which is only accident, is everywhere in nature as in human life.

On older trees still huge lobes of fungi grew like lungs. Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted, the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling.

Accident or chance, then, is at the heart of Hardy's world, for man is the the most unaccountable accident of all. midway between the creation and the point where God once was—suspended between nature and nothingness. What supports him there, and how he got there, are questions which Hardy can answer only by personifying nothingness itself (that nothingness which once had been God), and attributing to it will and enmity. He has to hate it because he loves man. But it is hard to tell whether his love is a reflection of his hate, or his hate of his love. They are inextricably bound together, he cannot express the one without implying the other, his love is never pure acceptance. Consequently it can sometimes become perverse and corrupt, as in the passage where the President of the

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Immortals has his last joke with poor Tess.

Hardy's greatness, in the novels particularly, is a mixed greatness. The passage in *The Return of the Native* describing Mrs. Yeobright's walk back across the heath after being turned away from her son's door illustrates this mixed character of his imagination. On her way she meets a little boy who trots beside her, staring curiously into her face.

"'Tis a long way home, my child, and we shall not get there till evening."

"I shall," said her small companion. "I am going to play marnels afore supper, and we go to supper at six o'clock, because father comes home. Does your father come home at six too?"

"No, he never comes, nor my son either, nor anybody."

"What have made you so down? Have you seen a ooser?"

"I have seen what's worse—a woman's face looking at me through a window-pane."

"You must be a very curious woman to talk like that."

"O no, not at all," she said, returning to the boy's prattle. "Most people who grow up and have children talk as I do. When you grow up your mother will talk as I do too."

"I hope she won't, because 'tis very bad to talk nonsense."

"Yes, child, it is nonsense, I suppose. Are you not nearly spent with the heat?"

"Yes. But not so much as you be."

"How do you know?"

"Your face is white and wet, and your head is hanging-down-like."

The boy leaves Mrs. Yeobright sitting in the middle of the heath and asks her what he should tell his mother. Mrs. Yeobright answers:

"Tell her you have seen a broken-hearted woman cast off by her son."

This is the height to which Hardy can rise when coincidence has engineered his characters into a tragic

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situation. But how did Mrs. Yeobright get there? By a fantastic series of misunderstandings in which there was no substance; for her son Clym had not turned her away, and his wife Eustacia did not really wish her ill. The little house where this false tragedy was concocted, with Clym fast asleep in one room, Eustacia and her former lover Wildeve whispering in the other, and Mrs. Yeobright knocking at the door, resembles a setting of one of those farces where figures keep unexpectedly popping out of bedroom wardrobes. Yet a whole sequence of disasters follows from this scene, including the death of Mrs. Yeobright, Eustacia and Wildeve.

Hardy's tragic scenes have this mixture of poetry and absurdity. But the evocations of the remote relations between man and indifferent nature by which he prepares for them show a wonderful delicacy and truth. A fine example is the passage in *The Woodlanders* where Giles Winterborne and Marty South plant the young pines

"How they sigh directly we put 'em upright, though while they are lying down they don't sigh at all," said Marty

"Do they?" said Giles "I've never noticed it "

She elected one of the young pines into its hole, and held up her finger, the soft musical breathing instantly set in, which was not to cease night or day till the grown tree should be felled—probably long after the two planters had been felled themselves

Even in describing passionate love Hardy strikes this remote, faintly menacing note, through which sounds the indifference of the universe

Clym and Eustacia, in their little house at Alderworth, beyond East Egdon, were living on with a monotony which was delightful to them. The heath and changes of weather were quite blotted out from their eyes for the present. They were

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enclosed in a sort of luminous mist, which hid from them surroundings of any inharmonious colour, and gave to all things the character of light. When it rained, they were charmed, because they could remain indoors together all day with such a show of reason, when it was fine they were charmed, because they could sit together on the hills. They were like those double stars which revolve round each other, and from a distance seem to be one. The absolute solitude in which they lived intensified their reciprocal thoughts, yet some might have said that it had the disadvantage of consuming their mutual affections at a fearfully prodigal rate.

He conveys into a description of light falling on a woman's face a sense of the distant relation between her and the sun which mechanically shines on her and mechanically takes away its light again.

When she looked down sideways she became pretty, and even handsome, particularly that in the action her features caught slantwise the rays of the strongly coloured sun, which made transparencies of her eyelids and nostrils, and set fire on her lips.

Hardy's massive tragic effects are built up on numerous minute perceptions such as these.

Hardy was partial to man, to be partial is to be involuntarily unjust, and in taking evil from man's shoulders he robbed man of one of his indispensable possessions. For in relieving man of evil he did not improve his situation, but made it worse, since he concentrated all evil against him. His characters, therefore, are curiously neutral; they gain colour only when passion or misfortune touches them, and are quite convincing only in their helplessness and instability. He draws women better than men. He sees woman and her response to love almost with a woman's eyes. He is on woman's side against man, just as he is on man's side against nature, and for the same reason, for

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woman is the final victim. He drew one man of strong and active character, Michael Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. But most of his men are simple or priggish or effeminate. Their highest virtue is uncomplaining endurance of misfortune, a virtue which they share with women. In describing endurance Hardy is best, for by enduring man seems to rise above the malice of fate by a pure act of magnanimity comprehensible only to himself. The peasants who form a chorus to the novels are the final expression of this endurance, which has become so native to them that it has been transformed into a kind of humour. They are too low to fear a fall. They are in the position where the universe wants to have them, therefore beyond the reach of tragedy the speakers of the epilogue to every action.

FRANZ KAFKA

KAFKA starts with a general or universal situation, not a particular one. This being so, it does not matter where he begins his story, for the situation is always there, and always the same. He does not have to wait, like most writers, for some incident, some human entanglement, to strike his imagination. A mere subject for a story in the ordinary sense, indeed, would cramp his imagination, he would feel it as a constraint. In his diary he notes that when he tries to write on a set theme he is quite at a loss, but that as soon as he scribbles down a sentence such as "He stood at the window and looked down at the street", he knows he is absolutely right. It is one of the quite ordinary doors through which he can enter the universal situation. Emerson says, "The way to the centre is everywhere equally short", and Kafka might have echoed the thought in a different accent.

As the situation is universal and stationary, it is also storyless, and this is the point at which Kafka's art begins. He is a great story-teller because there is no story for him to tell, so that he has to make it up. No foundation in fact, no narrative framework, no plot or scene for a plot is there to help him, he has to create the story, character, setting and action, and embody in it his meaning. But a difficulty arises. For the meaning of a universal situation is inexhaustible; the story can, and actually should, go on for ever; whether it ends or not is unimportant. In his three great stories the endings are indicated, but there are gaps in the story, how great or how small it is impossible to

say, and this does not matter

His stories generally begin in the midway of life, at a point decided by the chance of the moment, and yet at a decisive point, since in the universal situation every point is decisive. The image of a road comes into our minds when we think of his stories, for in spite of all the confusions and contradictions in which he was involved he held that life was a way, not a chaos, that the right way exists and can be found by a supreme and exhausting effort, and that whatever happens every human being in fact follows some way, right or wrong. The road then is there, we may imagine beside it a wayside inn from which an anonymous figure is just emerging. He looks ahead and sees, perhaps on a distant hill, a shape which he has often seen before in his journey, but always far away, and apparently inaccessible, that shape is justice, grace, truth, final reconciliation, father, God. As he gazes at it he wonders whether he is moving towards it while it is receding from him, or flying from it while it is pursuing him. He is tormented by this question, for it is insoluble by human reasoning. He feels irresistibly drawn towards that distant shape, and yet cannot overcome his dread of it. Kafka describes in *The Castle* the struggle to reach it, and in *The Trial* the flight from it. But the hero can neither reach it nor escape it, for it is enveloped in a mystery different from the ordinary mystery of human life, and he does not know the law of that mystery. The roads leading towards it are therefore deceitful; the right turn may easily chance to be the wrong, and the wrong the right. In his greatest story Kafka tells how the hero sets out on a road which seems to be leading straight to the Castle, the dwelling-place of the blessed, but how after walking for a long time he finds that though it appears to be making towards the Castle it never brings him any nearer. This or

something like this happens innumerable times in his stories, it may almost be said, indeed, that nothing but this happens, though the situation conceals itself behind so many veils that the event, when it occurs, always seems novel and unique

The frustration of the hero is an intrinsic part of Kafka's theme, and it is caused by what in theological language is known as the irreconcilability of the divine and the human law, a subtle yet immeasurable disparity. Out of this dilemma Kafka fashions his stories, or rather his story, for it is one story; he has nothing else to tell. He was confirmed in his reading of it by his study of Kierkegaard, but he must himself have made that reading independently, for his whole unhappy upbringing was behind it, and particularly his relation to his father whom he could never reach, and from whom, until he was nearly forty, he could never escape. When as a young man, with a young man's metaphysical passion, he universalised this situation, he fashioned God in his father's image. At thirty-seven he at last made a great settlement with his father in an inordinately long, eloquent and still unpublished letter where, having stated his case against his father, he went on with equal scrupulousness to state his father's case against himself. Afterwards the compulsive tie binding him to his father seems to have eased, and his conception of the universal situation became less massively pessimistic. The change can be seen in the stories which he wrote during the last few years of his life, where there is an approach to serenity. In his letter to his father he used the same method as he had employed in *The Castle* and *The Trial*, for what is so striking in them is the care he takes to state both sides of the problem: man's side, and God's.

But the supreme originality of Kafka's work does not lie in his reading of the universal position, which

he shared with Kierkegaard at some points, but in his story-telling, by means of which he created a world. He is a great story-teller both by his art and by the interest and value of what he says. And the value of what he says does not depend on the truth of his metaphysical structure, any more than the value of what Dante says depends on his theology. We can read *The Castle* and *The Trial* rejecting his theory of the irreconcilability of divine and human law, and yet find in them the most enchanting discoveries, the most startling riddles, the most profound insight into human life. It is these that give his work its endless interest: the metaphysical structure, impressive as it is, is only a structure. But he enchants us equally by his art. To read him is to realise what the craft of story-telling exists for. Though modern realistic practice may conceal the fact, it is clear that story-telling is essentially a matter of invention, for all that any writer can start with is a mere narrative framework, and invention of scene and detail and dialogue alone can give it life. Kafka does not have even a narrative framework; so that the story becomes invention and nothing else. And though this may seem a drawback, it is really an advantage, for the invention, being new by necessity, is endlessly surprising, as invention should be. The scenes and figures and conversations seem to rise out of nothing, since nothing resembling them was there before. We contemplate them as we contemplate things which we see for the first time. As they exist in a world which is strange to us, the narrator has to describe them with minute exactitude, and from this necessity springs one of the most delightful graces of Kafka's art, his circumstantiality. To describe circumstantially a railway station or a large hotel or a public-house would weary us, since we are likely to know them, but Kafka's detail is more like that of a travel book.

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which recounts minutely the customs, dresses and utensils of some newly discovered tribe; everything is strange. Besides, each detail in these stories has a purpose, and tells us something which has to be told, and is an intrinsic part of the story. Or of the structure, for *The Castle* and *The Trial* are not only stories, but edifices built according to a metaphysical specification. As the story proceeds the edifice rises.

The hero of the two great stories is anybody, and his story is the story of anybody. "Anybody" is obviously an allegorical figure, fit to be designated as K or Josef K, as Kafka names the heroes of *The Castle* and *The Trial*. Yet these stories are not allegories. The truths they bring out are surprising or startling, not conventional and expected, as the truths of allegory tend to be. They are more like serious fantasies, the spontaneous expression of Kafka's genius was fantasy, as his early short stories show. Fantasy came as naturally to him as writing. In *The Castle* and *The Trial* he employs it for purposes as serious as any writer has ever attempted. But no designation of his art is satisfying. We can see what it was not, to find a name for it is of little consequence.

The influence of Kafka on modern writing, particularly on the work of English writers such as Rex Warner and William Sansom, comes from his art, not from his view of life; from what he does, not what he says. He has provided imaginative writers not merely with a way of looking at life, but with a way of dealing with life. In an age obsessed by the time sense, or, as it is called, the historical sense, he has resurrected and made available for contemporary use the timeless story, the archetypal story, in which is the source of all stories.

OSWALD SPENGLER

OSWALD SPENGLER once had a great vogue in Germany. He first became known in England when volume one of his chief work, *The Downfall of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*), was translated after the 1914-18 war. It was not so well received as in Germany: some of the reviews were adverse; but the majority were respectful or enthusiastic. Spengler's reputation in England was ruined by the translation of his last book, *Years of Decision* (*Jahre der Entscheidung*), in which he prophesied two centuries of world wars. It was a short book written in a popular style, and in spite of the horrifying prospect which it opened into the future, it stated explicitly the chief heads of Spengler's philosophy of history. I wish in this essay to enquire into one or two aspects of that philosophy.

I had better deal first with Spengler's verbal brutality, which, though it fits his philosophy well enough, is not necessary to it. He is fond of such generalisations as.

Man is a *beast of prey*. I shall never tire of proclaiming that. All the moralizers and social uplifters who would pretend to be something better are only beasts of prey with their teeth drawn. When I call a man a beast of prey whom do I insult, man—or the beast? For the great beasts of prey are consummately noble creatures, and without the hypocrisy of a human morality based on weakness.

The essential thing here is Spengler's inflection, not what he says. Many people before him have held that man is a beast of prey, Hobbes did so. But he did not think it was a noble or edifying fact, he did not romantic-

ally exalt the lion, the tiger and the shark, and exhort man to become like them. This is what Spengler does, beast of prey in his vocabulary is a term of praise, and this fact is only to be accounted for in part by his philosophy of history, and requires further explanation. The explanation, I think, is that he belongs to a special class of writer. the pseudo-man of action. Carlyle, who belonged to it too, occasionally made assertions of a similar kind, and Nietzsche did so fairly often. Real men of action do not write in this way, they can be brutal, but not romantically brutal; they know too much about the human tiger and shark. The pseudo-man of action alone romanticises brutality in this way, and by the pseudo-man of action I do not mean the man who, but for some physical or other incidental defect, might have become a great figure in history, but the man who lives in a dream of action, imagining that by the ardour of his dream he influences events. Carlyle behaves in this way when he exhorts Cromwell at the critical point of battles, forgetting that his exhortations come two centuries too late, Nietzsche, when he constitutes himself the official midwife of a Superman who is never born; and Spengler, when he implies that in writing about history he is in some way making it. A man who is not framed for action will commit the most shocking errors in writing about it and violate the moral sense of ordinary people without being in the least conscious that he is doing so. Carlyle and Nietzsche were in practical capacity below, not above, the average; but they felt a need to identify themselves in some way with action. The result was a sort of sycophancy towards all men who could do things. the attitude of a weak boy to a strong one, or of a country doctor superintending the birth of the young master at the big house. The task of the reason is to judge action; but men like Carlyle and Nietzsche who live

in a vicarious dream of action can only glorify it, betraying reason to their infatuations. Spengler does this too, but his god is not any man of action in particular, but history, which is action generalised, and as he writes of it as a pseudo-man of action, his history is really a dream of history

A dream of history can be constructed only by a man who knows a good deal of history, and as knowledge is always respectable, such dreams are accorded a greater intellectual estimation than the dream of fair women which inspired one of Tennyson's poems. They postulate, for one thing, "the historical sense", a modern faculty which is very useful and enjoys a great deal of prestige. The historical sense, as writers like Spengler employ it, envisages human life as a finite phenomenon completely hemmed in by Time. Time determines the forms of human life at different periods, making it a different thing, for instance, in ancient Greece from what it is to-day. Though this is a platitude it is one which in our age has acquired a new importance. But historical time is also a process with laws of its own, by virtue of which civilisations rise, grow, flourish and decay (Spengler's favourite theme) in accordance with a necessity which no human effort can influence, and human life, at any point at which we may consider it, is merely an effect of that process. Everyone who possesses the historical sense does not go to such extremes as this, but Spengler does, he makes of history, or rather of the historical process, the sole significant embodiment of human life, and consistently implies that the individual human existence is not of the slightest consequence.

The best way to show this is to allow him to speak for himself.

"We live in a mighty age. It is the greatest that the culture of the West has ever seen or ever will see, the same

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that the ancient world knew between Cannae and Actium, the age that produced the splendid names of Hannibal, Scipio, Gracchus, Marius, Sulla, Caesar. The Great War was only the first lightning flash falling from the thunder-cloud which floats, heavy with fate, over this century. *The form of the world* is today being radically remoulded as it was by the nascent Imperium Romanum, without regarding the desires and wishes of 'the many', or counting the sacrifices which *every* such decision demands. But who can understand this? Who can endure this thought? Who can feel it a joy to be alive when this is happening? The age is a great one, but its men are correspondingly small. They can no longer endure tragedy, either on the stage or in real life. But the destiny which flung them into this decade has them by the throat and will do with them what must be done, whether they will or no. The cowardly safety of the end of last century is over. *Life as danger*, the *real* life of history, once more enters into its right. Now only the man who *dares*, who has the courage to see and deal with things as they are, really counts. A time is coming—more, it is already here!—which will have no room for sensitive souls and frail ideals. The ancient barbarism which for centuries lay fettered and buried beneath the strict forms of a high culture is awakening again, now that that culture is consummated and civilization has begun the warlike and healthy joy in a man's own strength, which an age of rationalist thought saturated in literature despised, the unbroken instinct of race, which is resolved to live otherwise than under the oppression of piles of dead books and bookish ideals."

This is simultaneously a glorification of the Nazi creed, and an intimation that Germany need not put up with its first defeat.

Again it is the bombastic inflection that arrests the attention most loudly; Spengler is so in love with tragedy that anyone who does not welcome it with open arms, whether as torture, mutilation, sudden death, or mere starvation, is not worth his consideration.

But the important thing about this passage is that it embodies his view of history, and consequently his view of human life. I shall quote one or two further passages to make this clearer.

In ages of high culture human history is the history of political powers. The form of that history is war. Peace is only another variety of it. It is the continuation of war with other means. Domestic politics exists solely to secure the power and unity of external politics. Where it follows other aims of its own the state begins to decline.

A strong race must not only have an inexhaustible birthrate, but also a rigid process of selection through the hardships of life, accident, sickness and war. The medical science of the nineteenth century, a true product of rationalism, is from this point of view a sign of decadence.

This view of history and of human life is put forward quite seriously and has been accepted by many people. The two most obvious things about it are that it makes no allowance for the moral impulses of mankind, and that it grants no value to individual existence. For it, Christ is non-existent either as a historical figure or as a spiritual reality. Man as an individual exists only in so far as he furthers some change in the perpetual process of change that is called history. And history itself is merely a play of forces, in which one factor, and one factor alone, is decisive: power. This is our life in its essence: the rest is talk, morality, day-dreaming, ideology.

The best way to estimate this view of life is to compare it with one which used to be universal and is still held, I think, by the great majority of people. It accepted as the unit of its general view of human life something temporally far smaller than the units of the historical sense, it saw life as a progress from the cradle to the grave, not as the growth, fruition, decline and

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downfall of civilisations. It started from the individual but reached the universal, since individuality is the universal form in which human life manifests itself. Accepting individuality as the norm, it sought to discover the nature of the laws which govern the individual existence, and its ultimate meaning. This was a task which carried it beyond history into religion, for the view of life of which I am speaking could not admit that human life was a historical phenomenon and nothing more. Mankind's secular destiny was certainly worked out in history, and history was therefore a process of the utmost significance. But man was also an immortal soul, whose essence could never be seized and contained by history. He had longings which history could not satisfy, and sorrows of which history took no account. He was an actor simultaneously in the historical drama and in another whose terms were strange to history: a drama of sin and atonement, aspiration and failure, which implied a responsibility to something beyond time. On this foundation the old traditional view of human life was based: on man's existence from birth to death, and on immortality. It took into account not only what man succeeded in being on this earth (that is history), but all that he failed to be. History is the record of human limitation; it accepts action effectively operative in time, and nothing more. Religion accepts the totality of human desire, disappointment and fulfilment, whether effectively operative in time or not. Its basis is therefore wider than that of history, though temporally it seems more restricted: the life of a human being from birth to death. Accordingly it could not dismiss morality and individuality as mere trimmings of existence, and assume, as Spengler does, that they are of no importance. It accepted them as essential attributes of human nature, and tried to account for them and give them a meaning.

Now it seems to me that we are seeing to-day a fight between these two views of life: the religious view, which is also that of the artist, and the historical view. The virtue of the first—not its supreme virtue, which is its truth, but its relative pragmatic virtue—is that it gives meaning to the actual life we live, and accounts to us for ourselves. In one of his essays Alexander Blok, the Russian poet, claimed that the time of “Goodness, Beauty and Truth” was past. That is a typical if extreme utterance of the historical sense, and at the same time an error which could have been avoided by remembering that human life is a life between birth and death, and that in that life the individual, whether civilised or savage, cannot but have some relation, positive or negative, to Goodness, Beauty and Truth. Spengler, politically a bitter enemy of everything Blok believed in, thought here in the same way. To him the one operative factor in existence is not goodness, beauty or truth, but power, and so he praises the beast of prey and pours scorn on “a human morality based on weakness”. The old view of life sees endless variety and complexity in human existence, and yet makes certain fundamental distinctions: good and evil, truth and falsehood, guilt and innocence. The new historical view as expressed by Spengler sees no essential variety in human existence at all, but only the category of power, or, in other words, of necessity, and yet, in spite of its simplicity, it leads to no conclusion. It remains on the plane of pure relativity. And on the plane of pure relativity it is possible to prefer anything to anything else: a well-grown tiger to Socrates or Christ, brutality to kindness, cunning to honesty, treachery to good faith. One can therefore say with a good conscience. “The medical science of the nineteenth century, a true product of rationalism, is . . . a sign of decadence”, or. “Few can stand a long war. But nobody could stand a

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long peace", because one has no palpable human reality to hold on to, and has forgotten the pitiful limitations and the necessary virtues of existence as the individual knows it. So in men without imagination, like Spengler, the spectacle of history can easily rouse an irrational arrogance. The historian who accepts the limitations of ordinary existence may find some matter for grief in contemplating battlefields and massacres, but the feelings of a man who regards history as the sole meaning of human life must be somewhat different, and it may easily be beneath him to "regard the desires and wishes" or "count the sacrifices" of "the many". And here we come to the point where Spengler's verbal brutality and his philosophy of history meet. A purely relative view of human destiny based on a theory of a play of forces gives an opportunity, indeed a justification, for brutality.

Another danger of a view of life which is not based on the fundamental fact of the individual human existence is that it is extremely susceptible to fashion. The history of Spengler's literary development is instructive. In 1918 Germany was defeated, and a few years later there appeared the first volume of *The Downfall of the West*, proclaiming that all Europe was doomed. After the peace came the German inflation, one of whose effects was that the German peasantry hoarded their produce or profiteered in it, so that a lively antipathy arose between the country and the towns. Presently appeared the second volume of *The Downfall of the West* which prophesied, among other things, that one of the decisive struggles of the future would be the struggle between the country and the towns. But meanwhile Germany had become a tepidly Social Democratic Republic, and Spengler published another book called *Prussianism and Socialism*, in which he tried to show that both political forms were inspired by the same ideal. Then German Social Democracy entered

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into its swift decline, and with the advent of Hitler Spengler's last book, *Years of Decision*, appeared, which foretold the rise of a whole line of Caesars

By all this I do not intend to cast any aspersion on Spengler's honesty, but merely to show that he was a man extremely susceptible to fashion. He was obviously sincere when he complained, in a footnote to his last book, that "What I described in *Prussianism and Socialism*—and it has almost always been misunderstood—was Socialism as an *ethical attitude*, not as a materialistic economic principle". Fashion is a sweeping generalisation from insufficient or trivial evidence, and that might be a description of all Spengler's books. The temporary downfall of Germany after the war, enlarged and touched up in his dream of history, became the final downfall of Europe. The appearance of Hitler was sufficient to presume the advent of a whole line of Caesars. A few years were sufficient to change Spengler's conclusions about the whole future of history. Yet these conclusions were formulated as universal truths, facts as incontestible as the latest mode. And this is understandable, for the historical sense must always be revising its conception of history in accordance with the contemporary growth of history. It has no hold on any other reality. And without a hold on some other reality, it is impossible to have a true conception of human existence.

Spengler was an excellent pamphleteer with an astonishing gift for facile generalisation, he was not, as a thinker, of any importance. But he was of some importance as a wholesale dealer in the historical sense, as a man who employed the historical sense with unexampled irresponsibility, so that in his works it can see a caricature of itself. The historical sense is a useful method for viewing human life in the large; but when it edges out every other method, invading not only

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history, where it is only partially valid, but fiction and poetry as well, it becomes a great danger

This has happened. It is shown in the vagueness of the figures portrayed by contemporary novelists, where character dissolves into a mere development. It is shown, too, in the fact that a writer whose views of human life were so strikingly unreal as Spengler's could at one time be welcomed with respect, and without surprise, by the intelligent

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IN his book, *The Novel and the Modern World*, Mr. David Daiches gives an excellent statement of what is called the political view of literature. From that standpoint he criticises a number of modern novelists, Galsworthy, Conrad, Katherine Mansfield, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley. The criticism is sensitive and closely reasoned. The four essays on Joyce are especially penetrating, for in them Mr Daiches puts into practice his counsel to work from the wider context inward and from the work outward—the wider context being society. But the working inward determines to a great extent what he finds in the work itself, it blinds him, for instance, to the strong Catholic element in Joyce's work. To him Joyce has always striven to achieve the perfect work of art—"the work which says all things at once so that the life he describes is all life, and the words in which he expresses himself convey no point of view because they convey all points of view." There is some truth in this, but none which can explain why Joyce should write at all; for no one can write without having some point of view, without seeing life in some terms. The terms in which Joyce sees life are difficult to define because of his simultaneous revolt against and attachment to the Catholic Church, his attempt to describe all life is really an attempt to portray all Joyce, and his work is a minute, Catholic self-inquisition conducted in an anti-Catholic or burlesque-Catholic spirit. But the Catholic impulse in Joyce does not count for Mr. Daiches, because the wider context from which he works inward

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does not include Catholicism except as something to be interpreted in political terms

Within such limits his criticism is thorough. His point of view, on the other hand, and the kind of statement by which he supports it, become more doubtful the more clearly they are formulated. As that point of view is widely held, it may be worth while to consider it. Mr Daiches "works inward" from such assumptions as this

Unfortunate as we are in many respects in living in the present world rather than in some time in the past, we are at least fortunate in this that we are living at a time when the state of civilisation is patent to all. No intelligent observer who has not allowed wishful thinking to master his intellectual processes can deny that we are living in the midst of the disintegration of a civilisation, or, to put it in a less terrifying manner (though it is terrifying), in a transitional stage between two civilisations. Rarely, if ever, has the nature of the contemporary situation been so clear to observers. We can look back on the recent past, knowing what it has been leading to, and analyse it with the familiarity of a contemporary, yet with the knowledge which hitherto has been reserved for the future historian. While as a rule the contemporary cannot see the wood for the trees and the historian cannot see the trees for the wood, here is a situation which seems to offer a chance of seeing clearly both the individual trees and the wood as a whole.

A great number of intelligent people would agree without qualification with most of the things which Mr. Daiches says here, and would regard them as truisms. For myself, I cannot feel sure of any of them, except the fairly clear evidence that a disintegration is going on. Whether that is a disintegration of civilisation or of something within civilisation I do not know. Whether in the first case it will lead to another

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civilisation or to something which cannot properly be called civilisation at all (Fascism, for example), and whether in the second case civilisation will manage to cure the disease within it, no one can possibly know. Mr Daiches does not say what he means by civilisation; he may mean much the same as politicians mean when they say that this or that will spell the end of civilisation, but I do not think so. As for the nature of the contemporary situation being unusually clear to observers, we may certainly think it is clear, or feel convinced that it is clear, but there is evidence that it is not clear, since it is seen in one set of terms by some intelligent men and in another set by others. Mr. Daiches says that we can see both the wood and the trees, but the trees which Mr T S Eliot sees are not Mr Daiches' trees. Mr Daiches is at liberty to say that Mr Eliot is wrong, but not that his opinions do not exist. Again, whether the future will be fought for between the Fascists and the Communists is becoming more and more doubtful; and in the months since Mr Daiches wrote his book it has become equally possible to regard the conflict as a conflict between Democracy (what there is of it) and Totalitarianism (all there is of it), or even as a conflict between Christian civilisation and a civilisation founded on a purely secular creed. The contemporary situation, then, is by no means clear, yet the wider context from which Mr Daiches works inward assumes that it is perfectly clear. This assumption is founded ultimately on some such hypothesis as dialectical materialism which simplifies everything on a vast scale. If a Calvinist critic in the Jacobean age had tried to assess Shakespeare, Donne and Webster in terms of the new dynamic theology, insisting that they could reflect their age only by associating themselves with the rising middle class, the new liberating force in society whose triumph was inevitable, we should have had a situation

similar to that which Mr. Daiches imagines the present one to be. In reality, the contemporary situation will not become clear until after the event, we do not know what shape it will have to the future historian; therefore we cannot judge contemporary literature by means of it. Ordinary legitimate scepticism should be enough to tell us this.

To see the contemporary situation as clearly as Mr. Daiches sees it we must simplify a great number of things. This leads Mr. Daiches to ignore Joyce's Catholicism, it also leads him to "interpret" Eliot's and Huxley's religious beliefs. As this interpretation is typical of a great deal of modern criticism I shall quote it.

It is interesting to compare T. S. Eliot's wasteland with the wasteland that Huxley paints in his early novels. They have much in common, though Eliot's is the wasteland of the thwarted classicist and Huxley's that of the thwarted romantic. Eliot emphasises lack of pattern and purpose while Huxley stresses lack of worth-whileness for the individuals involved. And ultimately (again, if he does not go crazy first) your thwarted classicist will find refuge in some fairly rigid and institutionalised scheme of things to compensate him for his wounded sense of order. He joins the Roman Catholic Church or, like Eliot, the Anglican Church, which is almost the same thing. Huxley becomes a mystical pacifist with inclinations towards a personal interpretation of Buddhism, whereas Eliot lands up by becoming an orthodox member of a highly ritualistic and hierarchic religion. They represent two complementary types. Both, it may be added, avoid the issue, which is not personal compensation but the alteration of the environment which has produced the necessity for that compensation—the evolution and stabilisation of a standard in which society can believe and with reference to which its activities can be given purpose and meaning and value.

The difficulty of dealing with criticism of this kind is that it entirely ignores the nature of the things it is

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treating It assumes that Mr Eliot's religion is not real religion, and ultimately, perhaps, that religion is itself unreal—the opium of the masses which has now become the opium of the literary classes It implies that if Mr Eliot set out to alter his environment, and identified himself with the proletariat, he would have no problems at all. To believe such things is ultimately to believe that we have no personal relations and no personal difficulties in living, but merely the public duty to change our environment, a duty which will bring us allies and enemies and nothing else Mr. Daiches thinks that Mr Eliot's religion is merely an avoidance of the issue and a compensation for his real duty; yet how he can believe that after reading *The Waste Land*, *Ash Wednesday* and *The Family Reunion* is past imagining, unless he has read them without believing that they deal with anything that is real Whoever enters imaginatively into the experience which Mr Eliot describes in *The Family Reunion* will be greatly surprised to hear his religion called a compensation. Anyone who cannot enter into it is not in a position to understand it; all that he can do, therefore, is to interpret it in his own terms, which are foreign to the terms of the experience itself. Words like "compensation" are two-edged; Mr Daiches' interpretation of Mr. Eliot's experience may be a compensation for not understanding it The first condition of any genuine criticism of Mr Eliot's religion is that it should be understood, the critic may then decide that it contains truth or contains nothing but error, but he is not entitled to transform it into something else and then assess it as something else. I do not know whether Mr Daiches would deny that there have been men who have been genuinely religious in the past and that there may be men who are genuinely religious now, the interpretative method of criticism, which deprives

everything of its individuality, changing it into something without individuality, can become so strange that one does not know what to expect. But at any rate he seems to be sure that in our own time, when "rarely if ever has the nature of the contemporary situation been so clear to observers", Mr. Eliot's religion can be only a compensation.

In this note I am concerned with questioning such assumptions, for they are hardly ever questioned. No doubt there is some truth in them, but evidently much error as well. Most of the error rises from the fact that such theories are too general to be applied to individual works of imagination without robbing them of their individuality. Here is an admirable statement of Mr. Daiches' theory.

A work may be many different things at the same time, but it is important to know which is the essential thing, what it is that determines the pattern and the scale of emphasis, what is the real work, and what are the by-products of it. The purely formal critic always tends to think that he knows what the work in question is simply because it is in print before him. But he is much mistaken. The printed text may stand for any number of different works, as the history of criticism abundantly shows. What the real work is and what gives the principle of organization to the whole can be certainly determined only by investigating the relation of the printed words to the civilization that produced them.

One might agree with this completely if one could be sure what Mr. Daiches means by the "real work", and if one were confident that the relation of the work to the civilisation which produced it could be ascertained with any precision. The work itself, as it lies in print before us, is an exact thing, the civilisation from which it sprang we can never see with the same immediacy. What happens when we read a novel?

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We recognise first, if it is a good one, that the author is describing real people and real experience. How do we recognise it? By drawing on our conscious or guessed-at knowledge of life, not on our knowledge of historical civilisation. The first impact of reality comes here, and it comes immediately. The novel may describe life in the eighteenth century or life to-day, the fact that the novelist is writing of a different period need not prevent us from seeing that he is dealing with real people. This is a fact at which no one would think of wondering, and it requires no explanation. But the work which moves us in this way, Mr Daiches asserts, is not the real work, to discover that we must establish the relation of the book we are reading to the civilisation from which it sprang. It is true that we shall not understand the book properly unless we do that, and unless we establish its position in the general course of literature. This can never be done completely, but the more we know about the historical genesis and position of a book the better we shall understand it. This is obvious. Where I disagree with Mr Daiches is where he says that the "real" work is discovered by investigating the book's genesis in the civilisation which produced it; for he seems to imply that our first actual experience of it—whatever it may be—*Tristram Shandy* or *Wuthering Heights* or *The Brothers Karamazov* or *The Thousand and One Nights* or *The Magic Mountain*—is in some way less real than these same books after the historical excavator has done with them. He implies this because he regards an understanding of the relation of the book to its period and its society not only as a help in understanding it more fully, but as a first interpretative principle which, by explaining both the novel and our response to it in a new way, turns them into something else. The "real" work is therefore not the one which originally

convinced us because it was true to experience, nor was our conviction "real"; both are as unreal as Mr Eliot's religion. Mr Daiches' insistence on this is merely another form of his insistence that the political interpretation is not merely one among several interpretations, but the only real one. What we gain by that interpretation is clearness—"rarely has the nature of the contemporary situation been so clear". What we lose is the conviction that in a work of imagination a mind can speak to a mind, immediately.

A short note on such a controversial subject must necessarily simplify things which are not simple. But questions must be simple, and I have one more. The thesis which Mr. Daiches works out in his book is "that the most serious and important section of modern fiction represents an attempted adjustment between literature and a certain state of transition in civilisation and culture generally, and that this adjustment explains most of the differentiating features of the twentieth-century novel as well as providing an impressive example of the kind of relation that exists and always has existed between any particular art and the general state of civilisation". He also considers that the adjustment to the transition explains the many experiments in form and language which mark the period. That period produced in this country *Ulysses*, *Sons and Lovers*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Nightwood*, and on the continent the works of Proust, Thomas Mann and Franz Kafka. The writers of this century have certainly been troubled by the problem of an era of transition; but it is clear that they have also been troubled by the desire to convey a new sense of experience. To say this, of course, is not to get past Mr. Daiches, for he can reply that that new sense of experience can also be explained by the writer's adjustment to a state of transition. But it cannot be imaginatively

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understood on that hypothesis; it loses its own reality and takes on a different reality in which all that was individual in it is generalised. Adjustment is not an adequate term for the experience described by Proust in *Le Temps retrouvé*, which drove him to devote the rest of his life to the resuscitation within him of *the Eternal Man*. It cannot explain any individual work, but only behaviour in general. If we could see our time with the eyes of a future historian, we would realise that everyone living in it—not only the writer but the capitalist, the Communist, the grocer, the scientist, the criminal, the banker and the baker—is “adjusted” to it in the most exact way. They have no choice. But that does not tell us much about them. The real defect of Mr. Daiches’ interpretation of literature, and of other interpretations of the same kind, is not that they are untrue (there is a good deal of truth in them), but that they are inadequate.

THE DECLINE OF THE NOVEL

WHEN one tries to define the difference between the position of the novelist fifty or a hundred years ago and his position to-day one finds that, though far-reaching, it can be put in simple terms. To the novelist fifty or a hundred years ago life obediently fell into the mould of a story, to the novelist to-day it refuses to do so. This recalcitrance of the subject-matter is not absolute, the novelist still manages to tell a story. *A la recherche du temps perdu* is a story; *Ulysses* is a story. But they are stories without an ending, and the characteristic modern novel is a story without an ending. At the start the novelist finds that his theme moulds itself obediently enough into a story, and the impetus carries him along for a while, but then it weakens, and when it has weakened to vanishing point the story has to stop, for it has no fixed destination. The modern novel is like a sentence that sets out confidently, the grammatical construction is ingenious, we admire the writer's skill in insinuating explanatory and qualifying clauses and all sorts of parentheses, but the sentence remains hanging in the air. This is another way of saying that the contemporary novelist has an imaginative grasp of origins but not of ends. There was a time when the novelist (and the poet and everybody) had a grasp of both. To have this is a mark of that order of thought and imagination which is generally called classical. Our own order is not a classical order, we have a grasp of origins but not of ends; our existence, like our works, is an unfinished sentence. And the novel describing the life we live is a symptom of the

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order in which we live; its incompleteness is a reflection of the incompleteness of a whole region of thought and belief

This is obvious enough; but our position in time makes it difficult for us to acknowledge it. We look upon the contemporary novel as one thing, and the order out of which it springs as another, and regard their problems as separate problems. We do not make this mistake when we think of the eighteenth-century novel; for when we read Fielding or Sterne we are conscious of the general body of sentiment, belief and thought that went into their work and belonged to the eighteenth century and to no other. Standing outside the eighteenth century, we can see it whole. But we cannot stand outside our own century, for we are part of it, and so the contemporary novel is a special and technical problem to us, one among many problems. Yet really there is perhaps only the problem caused by the lack of a normal and complete order in which existence would have unity and meaning

Before going farther it would be best to show what I mean by a story with and without an ending:

- (A) Joseph remains blest with his Fanny, whom he doats on with the utmost tenderness, which is all returned on her side. The happiness of this couple is a perpetual fountain of pleasure to their fond parents, and, what is particularly remarkable, he declares he will imitate them in their retirement, nor will he be prevailed on by any booksellers, or their authors, to make his appearance in high life.
- (B) I lingered round them [the graves], under that benign sky watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.

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- (C) She ran forward, always forward, into a faint streak of light. The darkness unfolded before her. There was joy in the running and with every step she took she achieved a new sense of escape. A delicious notion came into her mind. As she ran she thought the light under her feet became more distinct. It was, she thought, as though the darkness had grown afraid of her presence and sprang aside, out of her path. There was a sensation of boldness. She had herself become something that within itself contained light. She was a creator of light. At her approach darkness grew afraid and fled away into the distance. When that thought came she found herself able to run without stopping to rest and half wished she might run on forever, through the land, through towns and cities, driving darkness away with her presence.
- (D) Quickly, as if she were recalled by something over there, she turned to her canvas. There it was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attic, she thought, it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps, they were empty, she looked at her canvas, it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done, it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.

These four passages, in their order, are the last paragraphs of *Joseph Andrews*, *Wuthering Heights*, Sherwood Anderson's *Out of Nowhere into Nothing*, and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. The thing which strikes us most strongly now about the end of *Joseph Andrews* is its banality; indeed the end of the traditional novel, when it is not tragic as in *Wuthering Heights*, is generally banal, for it is expected. The last words in the stories

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by Sherwood Anderson and Virginia Woolf are far more interesting and more worthy of the mind's attention, for they show a deeper concern with the problem of experience, and can therefore be taken more seriously than Fielding's, which are purely conventional, a mere ceremonious good-bye to the chief characters. But though they are more interesting, and even significant, they are not entirely convincing; or rather they convince us only of the authors' search for a new kind of experience, not of the reality and ultimate significance of that experience as attributed to the characters. The significance of the traditional novel, whether comic like *Joseph Andrews*, or tragic like *Wuthering Heights*, lies within it, and the conclusion is merely a conclusion. In *Out of Nowhere into Nothing* and *To the Lighthouse*, the writer is still struggling to seize the full significance when the story ends. After Joseph is married and Heathcliff is buried, we feel there is nothing more to say. But after reading the last words of Sherwood Anderson and Virginia Woolf we feel that there is still something of the greatest importance to say, and that the ending is really a sort of beginning, the beginning of a quite different story. Something should have followed, but what that something is we do not know, because we live by an unfinished conception of life, exist in a circle which is never closed. Such endings are expressions of a hope of completion, arrows shot into the irresponsible future. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* ends with Paul striding back towards the lights of the town with his fists clenched; Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, with Stephen's solemn proclamation of his creed as a writer. Fifty or a hundred years ago a novelist would have asked: What next? What will happen when Paul is back in the town and has to unclench his fists? What will happen to Stephen's creed as a writer? Will it have changed in

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five or ten years' time? But our imagination stops short at a certain point and cannot go farther, for Paul and Stephen are launched into a world where neither their creators nor we can follow them. They stand at the beginning of a story which is never told.

'A story without an ending describes a mode of existence which has not been thought out and stops short of meaning.' The vision or the illumination is an acknowledgment of that lack of meaning, an attempt to fill up a void with a personal and mystical hope. A comprehensive and widely accepted conception of human life produces good imaginative art, a tentative and partially accepted conception of life, unsatisfactory imaginative art. In an age when such a conception prevails the subject-matter of the artist will not mould itself into a form; every image of human existence will have the mark of organic imperfection.

Is there any universal mark by which we can recognise a conception of human life that is complete and in a high sense normal to mankind? I shall hazard the assertion that all such conceptions postulate a transcendent reality and recognise man's relation to it, and that human life must always stop short of meaning if we seek its meaning merely in itself. To seek its meaning in itself is to seek its meaning in time; and the conception of life which prevails to-day is a conception of life purely in time. The contemporary novel is a story of time against a background of time. The traditional novel is a story of time against a permanent pattern. This does not mean that Fielding or Jane Austen were religious in any sense, or that when describing Tom Jones or Elizabeth Bennet they were concerned with eternal truths. But they lived in an order in which everybody possessed without thinking about it much the feeling for a permanence above the permanence of one human existence, and believed that the ceaseless

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flux of life passed against an unchangeable background. Men still felt this whether they were Christians or not. They felt also that there was a relation between the brief story of man and that unchangeable order, and this sentiment, in whatever terms it was held, was the final earnest of the completeness of their conception of life.

To return to the novel· it may be advanced that without this permanent background there can be no whole picture of life. Seen against eternity the life of man is a complete story. Seen against time it is an unfinished one, a part of endless change, a fleeting picture on an unstable substance. The traditional recognition of a permanence beyond the duration of the happenings told in one story belongs to a certain mode of thinking and feeling which has prevailed during the known past of European civilisation; it now prevails effectually no longer. That mode was auspicious to imaginative literature, and originally it was the creation of religion. So that in a sense imaginative literature is, if not the child, at least the grandchild or great-grandchild of religion. It may be that in its early stages the decay of religion encourages the production of imaginative literature, and the one thrives at the expense of the other, as during the Renaissance, but the complete decay of the religious sense would bring with it the atrophy of the creative imagination, which needs as a working hypothesis something more durable than the immediate subject-matter on which it works. It may be (if we can put reliance on contemporary theorists who think in terms of thousands of years, future years), that poetical and imaginative production is merely a passing human activity made possible by certain historical conditions and fated to disappear with them. This is the complement of another theory· that we are witnessing in our time the definitive

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liquidation of religion, and that in a few centuries the religious sense will have vanished for good. If that were so, it would be easy to believe that poetry and imagination in all its forms would disappear too. But the question is whether the religious sense can ever disappear. If it cannot, then neither can poetry and the various other forms of imaginative art.

The norm of human existence remains. There are certain beliefs which are natural to man, for they satisfy his mind and heart better than any alternative ones. The mark of such beliefs is their completeness, they close the circle. In a state of irremediable imperfection such as man's, the circle can be closed only by calling on something beyond man; by postulating a transcendent reality. So the belief in eternity is natural to man, and all the arts, all the forms of imaginative literature, since they depend on that belief, are equally natural to him. When that belief partially fails, imagination suffers an eclipse, and art becomes a problem instead of a function. If that belief were to fail completely and for good, there would be no imaginative art with a significance beyond its own time. But it is inconceivable that it should fail, for it is native to man.

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THE history of the modern novel describes the disappearance of man as religion and humanism conceived him. Instead, there has emerged a new species of the natural man dovetailed into a biological sequence and a social structure. This natural man is capable of betterment but, unlike the natural man of religion, has no need for regeneration. He is simply a human model capable of indefinite improvement on the natural plane; the improvement depending ultimately on the progress of society, and of things in general.

Towards the end of last century it was fashionable to call this new natural man "the thinking animal", and he has since been called "the unique animal". He follows a natural development from birth to death, and since this is all that is allowed him, it is important that he should pass through all its stages—childhood, adolescence, love, maturity—in a manner closely corresponding to the requirements of nature; otherwise he will be "frustrated" or "distorted". His upbringing, his surroundings, his ideas, should be as "natural" as possible. If they are, the expectation is that he will turn out to be satisfactory.

But in practice it is discovered that he is never quite satisfactory, that some residue of frustration or distortion always remains in him. This residue is taken to be due to the imperfection of our political and social system, and under a perfect constitution the assumption is that it would disappear. The corollary of the natural man is consequently the political man: the man

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conscious that something must be done collectively by all natural men, or a majority or an effective minority of them, in order that an opportunity may be given to every natural man to develop his natural potentialities in the most natural way conceivable

The difference between the natural man of myth and religion and humanism and the new natural man is quite simple. The first was not regarded as human in the complete sense until he put on the spiritual man; he had to be made anew by a process which did not enter into the rest of the biological sequence. This process was conceived symbolically as a rebirth, a spiritual act by which man was integrated into his true image and became conscious of his unique place in the world and in time. We may conceive the spiritual man as being grafted on the natural man, or as being innate in him and seeking to emerge from him into complete humanity. In either case, as the new man can exist only in the body of the old, his co-existence with the old implies a moral struggle in the centre of the individual, a struggle which determines in all sorts of ways his struggle to adapt himself to society, or society to himself, but is different in its intimacy, its unavailability and its apparent lack of utilitarian causation. This fundamental moral struggle within the individual was for many centuries accepted as the essential character of man. This being, suspended between good and evil by a law inherent in his nature, is the man of Dante and Shakespeare, and of Balzac and Tolstoy. He occupies a country of his own with unique rights and needs, quite apart from the biological sequence.

During a number of generations the frontiers of that country have been crumbling away. For the separate autonomous drama of mankind we have gradually substituted a natural process. The result has been a reduction of the image of man, who has become simpler,

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more temporal, more realistic and more insignificant.

The difference between man as he was conceived by Christian theology, by Dante, Milton, Pascal and the tragic poets of England and France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and man as he is understood in different ways by H G Wells, D. H Lawrence, the early Aldous Huxley, Mr Ernest Hemingway, M Henri de Montherlant and a great number of popular middle-brow novelists—for the most important point about the new conception is that it has become the popular conception—is difficult to define, though obviously great. One way of expressing it is by saying that to the traditional man the individual's life was a conflict, and that to the modern man it is a development. The conflict has been stated in various terms; but the formulation of it which is closest to our own ways of thinking and most readily understandable by us is that which we find in Milton and Racine: the conflict is a conflict between reason and passion or impulse. This formula was accepted as valid throughout the seventeenth and also a great part of the eighteenth century, though in its later stages in a somewhat mechanical way, reason and impulse tending to become categories instead of vital principles in the individual.

The Romantic Movement reinstated impulse, but it also did something else, it tended to identify reason with impulse, it substituted for the old conflict a sort of mystical co-operation. France, with its capacity for stating everything rationally, first worked out the implications of the new attitude. By a succession of writers from Madame de Stael to George Sand and Alfred de Musset the impulses were declared to be sacred, and more reasonable than reason itself. This phase, strewn with the wrecks of spontaneous love affairs, illustrated by a confused crowd of anonymous

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Byrons and Chateaubriands, did not last for very long. But it left behind, in spite of failure in practice, the assumption that reason and impulse worked in co-operation, and if this was so, there was nothing left for the individual but to develop. This assumption was merely implicit in the work of the romantics, it was not formulated until much later. It required for its formulation certain theories drawn from Darwin, and particularly the idea of evolution applied to the life of the individual. The old conflict was gone, or was hidden away. Darwin and the orthodox economists taught man the necessity for adaptation, Spencer and the Utopians opened before him the endless possibilities of evolution. The adaptation was a present need; the evolution, a future contingency. But at the same time the adaptation was a changing adaptation, for the environment of man was changing, and therefore to adapt oneself was to evolve. That the evolution might have no moral principle, that the environment of man might change for the worse instead of for the better, was not at that time seriously considered.

To contemplate man's image of himself changing and catch the stages of the change is almost as difficult as to imagine visually the process by which the countless animal species developed from a few simple prototypes. The idea of man current at any one time is not a homogeneous one; old conceptions linger on, new ones tentatively appear. The idea that man's life is a development, and part of a greater development which is essentially political or sociological, not moral or religious, was bound to lead to the conclusion that this development could be controlled, and that human life could be conditioned to a great extent, given the power and the equipment. To-day we can see this theory being applied on a large scale in several countries. For this theory man becomes a subject who responds in

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a more or less calculable way to certain things such as encouragement, suggestion, the carefully thought-out system which is called propaganda, intimidation, display, rubber truncheons and in general all the varieties of greed and hope and fear. As man is a creature with a natural development, entirely contained in his environment, all that is needed is to decide the terms within which he shall develop. Once these are settled by a sufficiently powerful group, men can be used with calculable accuracy.

This is a theory which could have been founded only on the new natural man developing within an environment in a calculable way, without any effective inward struggle, or any permanent conception of a desirable life, or any personal striving to realise it. If the theory does admit that such obstacles to its working exist it regards them as foolish, since they ignore the reality of *things*; such things as the power of the state, tanks, shells, concentration camps, and such things also as the natural man's appetites, vanities, angers, hopes, fears and hatreds, which can always be aroused, and which, with a little direction, can become irresistible. Consequently what has gradually been brought into prominence by the religion of development is the primacy of *things*, and it finds its fulfilment in the theory that men can be conditioned by things. Control things and you control mankind. In this conception the moral struggle which possessed the imagination of other ages, and was strong even a century ago, recedes into irrelevance, and becomes like one of those vestigial organs in the body which no longer perform any useful function, but exist merely to plague us—a sort of vermiform appendix.

It is easy to note the reduction of the image of man in contemporary politics, for there it presents itself in flesh and blood and works out logically in contempt

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for human freedom and for human life, things which always go together. To see it in contemporary literature is more difficult. Perhaps it can be best seen in a drastic simplicity. In his book *Modernes*, M. Denis Saurat makes the generalisation that in French literature the classical writers of the seventeenth century exalted reason, the Romantics of the nineteenth century emotion, and certain contemporary writers sensation. This generalisation traces the graph of the modern fall of man. It is a descent from complexity to simplicity, from the civilised to the primitive.

An idea of the change in our attitude to human life may be had by comparing any character in Dickens with any character in the early work of Mr. Ernest Hemingway. Dickens was an emotional writer, but he still knew that there was in the individual a struggle between impulse and reason. He was not a religious writer, but his characters still lived on a plane which was partly spiritual and partly natural. Mr. Hemingway's early characters live on the natural plane alone. The two gunmen in his short story, *The Killers*, are mechanical murderers, and their victim a mechanical murderess; they are all equally conditioned; and there is nothing to be said about them, except that they evoke the kind of pity and horror one might feel in watching some hunting beast pulling down and killing its prey. The story is astonishingly natural from one point of view, and astonishingly unnatural from another, for after all the characters are not animals but merely men thinking and feeling and acting in an extraordinarily circumscribed way. The murderers have no remorse; the victim has no feeling except animal resignation. The immediate lust to kill, the immediate dread of being killed, are all that remain. There is nothing but sensation.

Turn from this to Dickens. Jonas Chuzzlewit too

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is a murderer, but he never suggests to our minds the picture of an animal armed with a gun or a knife, he remains a human being with thoughts and emotions, horrible enough, certainly, yet drawn from the general source of human thought and emotion. In his short story Mr. Hemingway is sure of only one thing, the immediate sensation, and, being a scrupulously honest writer, he confines himself to that and leaves out thought and emotion as much as possible. He starts with the natural man following his needs, suffering from his frustrations as a wounded animal might suffer. And starting from that, it was impossible for him to reach the world of emotions and thoughts, for they are a legacy from the traditional man and are determined by beliefs which assume that man is not natural in the same sense as an adder or an ape is natural.

Mr. Hemingway began to write in the years of disillusion which followed the 1914-18 war, and the man he describes is therefore the frustrated natural man. Probably no one else has described more vividly the horror of the natural man's life when he is driven and goaded and denied natural satisfaction, and retires into himself to lick his wounds, or seeks forgetfulness in drink or sex. For many years Mr. Hemingway went on describing the frustrated natural man, articulate only in violence or in sensual experience. Then he discovered that the frustrated natural man was not enough, but that he must transcend himself and become the political man. This was the discovery of a whole generation, not of Mr. Hemingway alone; what makes it particularly interesting in his case is that we can see it taking place in his work. He began with the undirected revolt of *Fiesta*, he attained the disciplined revolt of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, with its glorification of the republican struggle in Spain. The man Mr. Hemingway describes in this book is still the natural

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man, fighting and lusting. He has merely added a few words to his vocabulary—the words liberty, fraternity and equality. They are sufficient in themselves to give him an aim beyond his appetites, but his way to them is still the way of the natural man, and only by fighting and killing can he achieve a world where there will be nothing to hinder his natural development, no obstacle, no frustration. The goal of all men has miraculously risen before him, although he has acknowledged nothing but sensation, three ideas have announced themselves to him, but they are in a different world from his world, and can be reached only in a different way from his way. They can be reached only by thought and feeling and the action which follows from them, while all that he can offer is sensation, a sort of *appetite* for liberty, equality and fraternity which drives him to batter down all that stands between him and them without knowing that, even if he were to gain them, he could not, as he is, enjoy them. This incompatibility between the natural man and his political aims makes Mr. Hemingway's later works sentimental in a curious way, it is as if we saw Caliban looking through the eyes of Prospero, and, without Prospero's rod, swearing to perform Prospero's miracle with his naked fists. This sentimentality of violence is implicit in the work of all writers who conceive Utopia as a kingdom to be taken by storm. Mr. Hemingway's first frustrated men were far more real.

The frustrated natural man was a popular, almost a typical, figure in the novel after the 1914-18 war, when hope and belief were at their lowest ebb. Some of the writers who wrote about him then have since given him up and turned elsewhere for a more adequate conception, Mr. Aldous Huxley, for example. But those who stuck to him and tried to educe something positive from him were finally left with no choice but to turn

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him into the political man. And when the natural man becomes political, there seem to be only two directions in which he can advance: towards Communism or towards Fascism. The man who thinks of himself as developing within an environment, without any deep-rooted resistance, will ultimately prefer that the terms of his environment should be laid down unmistakably, so that a clear channel may be provided for his impulses. In following these impulses he knows the only kind of freedom which he can know, and as that freedom seems infinitely dear to him in prospect, he is prepared even to die for it. Communism and Fascism, which both believe in the natural man, provide a channel for his impulses, in the one case a channel which may lead him to live better, in the other a steep road rushing steadily downwards, where he will bury himself entirely in nature in a sort of sacred frenzy. When the inward struggle of the individual is regarded as irrelevant such things as these can be achieved; the one thing which cannot be achieved is liberty.

Communism, by postulating the natural man and using him as he is, with his needs and his desires, tries to teach him, there are religious implications in Communism, no matter how carefully Communists may rule them out. Fascism is far more radically involved with the natural man, and rests upon him entirely. It does not look beyond him, but glorifies him, sees in him the sole hope of the future, and regards the spirit, the intellect and the rarer uses of the senses merely as diseases marring his natural perfection. The two modern writers who have described the natural man most penetratingly and eloquently, D. H. Lawrence and Henri de Montherlant, are therefore almost of necessity Fascists by implication. They are not pre-eminently political in their attitude. In Lawrence we have a fierce exposure of the squalor of

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Our industrial civilisation, and in Montherlant a contempt for all the shams of the age and a ruthless assertion of the right of the natural man to go his own way. They both criticise society from the "natural" point of view. Lawrence's criticism of Industrialism is that it frustrates even the simplest natural impulses, and sex in particular, the central impulse. The criticism is valuable because it is fundamental. Against the synthetic monstrosity of modern life he sets the values of blood and soil, the first natural values, essential because natural. But having affirmed them, he turns against what he calls "the white consciousness", the bloodless consciousness of the spirit, and whether he does this because it is spirit or because it is diseased spirit it is impossible to say. He preferred the primitive, for he felt that only the primitive, in a world he hated so much, was still sound. He was outraged by the Christian counsel to love your neighbour, and retorted that hate was often more honest and salutary, for hate was an instinctive discharge of energy, and in a world which lived mainly by routine, any instinctive discharge was to him its own justification. He asserted all the impulses of the natural man, love, hatred, anger, cruelty, and found a mystical meaning in the working of the passions. He found in them, too, a sort of mythology not unlike the mythology which the Nazis invented, though far less heavy and tedious, since he was a writer of genius. He wanted mankind to start again at the beginning, in a state beyond good and evil, and never reach the Fall. He would have been satisfied if man could be born properly once. The question is whether man can be born properly once, and therefore whether Lawrence's gospel was nothing but a dream. He saw that our senses and impulses were frustrated at every point by the life we live, he wanted a state in which they would function naturally, without distortion. He

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saw that such a state would be better than our present one. He believed that this state could be reached by a sort of mystical assertion of the natural man, here again he forestalled the Nazis. But the Nazis themselves have shown to what a belief of this kind leads, to violence, persecution, cruelty, war and, in the last resort, slavery. For the natural man is violent, quarrelsome, greedy, and also, since he has no permanent inner resistance, bound to be enslaved.

Montherlant's picture of the natural man is more sophisticated. His natural man has attended fashionable parties, and knows all the tricks of the social life. At the same time he has the greatest contempt for society and is by conviction anti-social. He is much more formidable than Lawrence's natural man, for he has examined the life of the spirit and sardonically dismissed it. He scorns the world in which he lives, a world of dupes, but he has no wish to change it, he is content that he himself should live the infinitely preferable life of an unusually honest and vital natural man. He is exclusive; he insists on his privileges. If he has a counterpart in the Fascist hierarchy, it is among the leaders who use the beliefs of the ordinary man for their own purposes, and see through the mythology while exploiting it.

The importance of Lawrence and Montherlant is that they draw with exceptional honesty the consequences of a belief in the natural man. These consequences are very different from those which his original sponsors expected. The believers in evolution thought that the natural man contained within himself endless potentialities of improvement, and their faith was founded on a mystical belief in the necessary tendency of things to go on improving for all time, it was founded on a faith in things. Man had merely to develop, and his development was guaranteed by the beneficial de-

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development of things, which was certain. Then it was discovered that man was not a single term in the equation, that some were fitted to lay down, within the human sphere, the conditions on which man should develop, and that others were fitted only to observe those conditions. For the first was reserved the actual conduct of human policy; for the second, a mythology that would please or inspire them, and make them eager to obey and ready to lay down their lives. Human life thus became a thing completely contained in an environment, and therefore a thing to which the imagination could give no ultimate significance, since there was not in it even the pretence of choice, even the day-dream of freedom. If the life of the individual is a development, then that development is simple and inevitable. If the life of the individual is a conflict, then that conflict implies a choice, and the choice, uncertainty, and uncertainty, the existence of more in human life than can be compressed into a formula. What has taken place in literature is a simplification of the idea of man, connected with this notion of natural process and development. The simplification is a general tendency; literature has not initiated but merely reflected it; and only those writers who are deeply rooted in tradition, and possessed with the idea of time, have been able to make headway against it; such writers as Proust, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, to confine ourselves to the novelists, there are similar figures in poetry. The obsession of such writers with tradition was called out by this human crisis. But Lawrence, Hemingway and Montherlant are completely in the modern convention. They accept the new leaf which history has turned, the leaf on which the war was written. They themselves write on that leaf, and the first words written on a new leaf, even by genius, are never new but merely primitive, a repetition or a variation of words.

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written on the first leaf of all, before civilisation began.

And yet history and experience tell us that human life is a development, not merely a struggle poised on its own centre, changing nothing. The struggle is an essential means for accomplishing the development. The evolutionists seemed to acknowledge this in their nineteenth-century formulas—the struggle for existence, the survival of the fittest, the adaptation to environment. Where they went wrong was in misconceiving the nature of the struggle. They regarded it merely as a function of the development and nothing more, “the struggle for existence”, “adaptation to environment”, meant only this. And if we regard the struggle merely as a function of development we create a mechanical universe with which the living mind can do nothing, since we eliminate the individual in whom alone the struggle attains self-consciousness, and rob development of all moral significance by substituting for the attainment of aims which men strive for because they are good, the mere accomplishment of a general process. Socialism and Communism are moral ideas, and spring from the desire to establish brotherhood and justice, without that desire they could never have arisen, and lacking it they are bound to accomplish something different from their proper end. For as man is a moral being, human development can be conceived only as a moral development, no evolutionary process can bring us brotherhood and justice, for they are not things merely to be ratified in a code (though a code is necessary), but principles to be given reality in all our private and public relations throughout society.

There is then a development, though it is not that which was formulated by the nineteenth-century evolutionists. And there is also a co-operation between reason and impulse, though it is not that which was embraced by Byron and George Sand. Without it

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indeed society would remain a hypothesis permanently beyond realisation. In exalting impulse, then, the Romantics did something which had to be done. The sedate see-saw of the eighteenth century with its mechanical opposition of reason and impulse, of man and nature, now one up, now the other, could not last. Pope, in presuming not God to scan and declaring that the proper study of mankind was man, enclosed man in an elegant vacuum, cut him off from nature in which his roots were fastened, and from God in whom he had his being. Man, God and nature were stationed at a neat Newtonian distance from one another; and this could be done with the complete approval of the mind because all three had become abstractions. To Wordsworth, on the other hand, musing

On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life,

these three entities interpenetrated one another in innumerable ways, nature was to him a "mighty sum of things for ever speaking", and God pervaded nature, so that there could be seen in

the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens,
the

workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end

In *The Prelude* it was Wordsworth's main object to show

How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted —and how exquisitely, too—

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Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind,
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish —this is our high argument

The poetry of Wordsworth has the truth of a vision—the vision he saw as a child and in two periods of his young manhood. To seize its truth in experience an unusual exercise of discrimination is needed. For it records a moment of mystical co-operation between reason and impulse, man and nature, it does not describe a process, or make a general statement about life which can be embodied in a theory. It is rather the outline of a possibility, and the record of moments in which that possibility was realised. But Wordsworth's followers vulgarised his conception of nature, and reduced to a dogma what to him had been an illumination, and between them with their crude faith in mountains and woods and the evolutionists with their benevolent universe evolving towards even greater benevolence, there was an intellectual and emotional affinity. Both of them, unintentionally, helped to set the moving principle of good outside man, and in doing so helped to dehumanise experience and history, whereas Wordsworth was essentially concerned with the mind of man and its capacity to respond to the mighty sum of things for ever speaking. In the response lay the co-operation between impulse and reason, and the possibility of harmony, without the response there was no harmony, and it could not be created by means of a theory concerning it. But the theory, nevertheless, dominated the nineteenth century, and has extended its influence over ours.

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